

# Steel for packaging – a CE success story

Alexander Mohr, secretary general of APEAL, the Association of European Producers of Steel for Packaging, looks at steel's impressive recycling rates across the continent and discusses the other qualities which position it as the ideal material for a circular economy

**S**teel packaging recycling has been catapulted into focus recently thanks to Europe's new Circular Economy Package, which proposes higher targets for all materials, notably 75% for steel in 2025. But steel for packaging is already well positioned to close the steel loop and help Europe meet future packaging demands.

A total of 75.2% of all steel packaging was recycled in 2013, making it the most recycled packaging material in Europe.

In some countries – Germany, Belgium and the Netherlands – the rate is above 90%, while in Portugal, Spain, France, Norway, Bulgaria, Romania and Hungary, rates already exceed 75%.

## Recycling credentials

Steel's unique inherent qualities give it a natural advantage over competing materials. Magnetic properties make it easy and economical to recycle as there is no need for a specific sorting process. Steel scrap is an

inherent part of the production process for new steel so every single steel plant in Europe is also a recycling plant, saving resources, energy and emissions by recycling steel in a simple and efficient process. And steel recycles forever without loss of quality.

It's not just steel's recycling credentials that have improved though.

New-generation steel food cans are now 46% lighter than those of 30 years ago – which makes steel as a material more appealing to packaging manufacturers, retailers, brands and, ultimately, consumers.

This also contributes to easier and more effective transportation and storage.

## Steel core

Despite its lighter weight, steel's strength – always its hallmark – remains. Virtually unbreakable and a 100% barrier against light, air and liquid, steel cannot be rivalled for its product-protecting qualities.

However, what's needed to increase recycling further is a clear policy-driver

and, thankfully, it is now on the horizon in the form of the CEP.

Proposed by the European Commission and currently going through the European legislative process, the CEP requires higher recycling rates, which are expected to drive national governments and the entire supply chain to step up their sustainability efforts.

Assuming the package passes successfully and firm policy follows, we expect to see recycling rates rise even higher, with a drive by national governments to improve collection systems, increase recycling processes and encourage manufacturers to incorporate recyclable materials into their design and production processes. Given ever-increasing consumer interest in sustainability, brands will be keen to accentuate their environmental credentials within marketing and promotional activities.

When market demand takes over, then circular economics can really begin to take effect. **RWW**

## Fact file: Steel for packaging

**75%**  
of all steel packaging was recycled in 2013



**1 tonne**  
recycled



over **2 tonnes**  
raw materials saved

Recycling steel packaging saves

**1.5**

times its weight in CO<sub>2</sub>



Energy consumption in production is

**60%**

lower than 50 years ago

New-generation steel food cans are **46%** lighter than 30 years ago



Steel is the most recycled packaging material in Europe



In 2013 over **4m** tonnes of CO<sub>2</sub> were saved through recycling