

Truck Loads of Weighty Figures Revealed: Ireland recycles 414,000 tonnes of used packaging

(Dublin, 30-07-04) 414,000 tonnes of used packaging was recycled and diverted from landfill in Ireland last year, enough to fill 51,750 trucks which would stretch in a traffic jam from Dublin to Killarney, Co. Kerry, according to the latest figures from Repak, the industry funded packaging waste compliance scheme. The tonnage recycled is also equivalent to 69,000 elephants or 414 million bags of sugar. In individual material types alone, Ireland recycled enough glass to build a tower to the moon in five years, enough paper and cardboard packaging to make 35.2bn sheets of A4 paper, enough steel packaging to make 49,382 cars and enough plastic beverage bottles to make 833,333 fleeces.

Paper/Cardboard

Ireland recycled 176,000 tonnes of paper and cardboard packaging last year; 45% of the total on the marketplace. This equates to the pulp from 2,992,000 mature conifer trees, which would on average, if forested, cover nearly 29 square miles, 10 times the size of the Phoenix Park or over half the size of Dublin city. 176,000 tonnes is also enough recyclable material for a staggering 35.2 billion sheets of recycled A4 paper or 70.4 million reams of A4 paper.

Glass

75,000 tonnes of glass was recycled; 67% of glass on the market. This is enough glass to make 243 million wine bottles. If laid out end to end the line of wine bottles would stretch 73,000km, which is almost twice around the circumference of the earth. If Ireland kept recycling glass at the current rate, a wine bottle tower could be built that would stretch to as far as the moon in just over five years. The recycling of this quantity of glass is enough to power a light bulb in every house in Ireland for a month.

Plastic

Repak helped fund the recycling of nearly 18% of all plastic packaging. This was split between farm film, shrink wrap, PET plastic bottles and other plastic bottles; 34,000 tonnes of total plastic was recycled. Within this enough PET plastic was recycled to make 833,333 fleeces, equivalent to 22.5 million plastic bottles and 340 million plastic refuse bags.

22,204 tonnes of shrink wrap and 9,500 tonnes of farm film was also recovered. This, when laid out would cover an area of the size of 1,369 kilometres squared or 37 km long by 37 km wide. This plastic sheet would cover the entire area of Co. Armagh (1,254 km squared) or one and half times the size of Co. Dublin.

Aluminium/Steel

Repak recorded the recovery/recycling of nearly 17% of all aluminium packaging, or the equivalent of 2,300 tonnes of aluminium, which is equal to 138 million beverage cans. This quantity of aluminium could be made into 205,970 bicycles. 38,000 tonnes of steel or 54% of all steel packaging was recycled, again enough material to make on average 49,382 cars.

Wood

88,000 tonnes of wood was recovered. This is enough wood to make 57,500 3-bed timber frame houses.

The figures were revealed as part of Repak's 2003 recycling results. The 414,000 tonnes of used packaging recovered equates to approximately 47% of all packaging placed on the Irish market which is 25% up on the 2002 figure and shows that Ireland is on course to meet 2005 EU packaging recycling targets of 50%.

Repak are now helping to fund kerbside collections reaching one in every four households as well as collections from over 50 recycling centres and nearly 2,000 bring banks nationally. Repak last year invested nearly €15.5m in direct recycling supports, which brings the total invested by Repak members in packaging recycling to a little over €55m over the last 4 years.

Repak grew its membership by over 500 member companies who alone contributed €2.3m in funding to Repak's total membership income of €15.1m. Total Repak membership now stands at over 1700 companies.

Commenting on the figures released, Andrew Hetherington, CEO Repak said "The total tonnage of recycled waste grew by 25% last year, helping Ireland edge ever closer towards our 2005 EU targets of 50%. These figures help people visualise the huge success Ireland has had to date in recycling used packaging and hopefully will highlight what can be done if more people were to engage in recycling. Although a lot of good work has been done, Ireland is facing tougher future EU targets requiring greater levels of funding. This cannot happen without the elimination of free riders who continue to ignore their legal obligations to pay for the recovery of their packaging, while Repak members carry the can for these law breakers."

Addendum

Recycling Tangibles Table

| Material Type Recycled | Equivalent |
|---------------------------------|---|
| Total | 69,000 elephants |
| Paper/Cardboard | Cover half of Dublin City |
| Glass | Glass Bottles stretching around world twice |
| Plastic Shrink Wrap / Farm Film | Cover Dublin County one and half |

| | |
|--------------------------------|----------------------------------|
| | times |
| Plastic beverage bottles (PET) | 833,000 fleeces |
| Plastic bottles (Other) | 340 million refuse sacks |
| Aluminium | 205,000 bicycles |
| Steel | 49,000 cars |
| Wood | 57,500 3 bed timber frame houses |

About Repak

Repak is a not-for-profit members based packaging compliance scheme, currently Ireland's only producer responsibility scheme, which was established under a voluntary agreement between industry and the Department of the Environment and Local Government in 1997.

It was created as industry's response to the obligations placed on Ireland by the EU directive on Packaging Waste (94/62/EC) and is the only government approved compliance scheme under the Waste Management (Packaging) Regulations 1997. Repak succeeded in reaching and exceeding Ireland's national recycling target of 25% of used packaging in 2001, as set by the EU directive.

The organisation also performs an administrative role for the recycling of used farm film (silage cover) through the IFFPG.

Repak also runs a variety of educational initiatives such as Repak National Recycling Week in October, Repak Green Christmas, Repak Members' Conference. It is also a sponsor of An Taisce's National Spring Clean campaign, the Tidy Towns Competition and the schools based Repak Cash for Cans programme.

Last year Repak launched a trial plastic and beverage carton recycling scheme as part of a strategy to target traditionally more difficult material types. The beverage carton scheme has now been extended to all households in Dublin with a kerbside/green wheelie bin collection scheme.

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