

SINGAPORE ENVIRONMENT COUNCIL (SEC) HIGHLIGHTS KEY SUCCESS FACTORS IN MANAGING SINGAPORE'S PACKAGING WASTE

Upstream solutions are required to move Singapore towards a Zero Waste Nation

Singapore, 23 August 2022 – Producers and regulators must step up in their role to work towards a better management of Singapore's packaging waste, says a report from Singapore Environment Council (SEC). Unveiling key findings from the '*Unlocking Opportunities for Sustainable Packaging in Singapore*' report, the study highlighted factors such as research and development (R&D), implementation of policies, and closing the gaps in waste collection as key factors in achieving zero waste in packaging.

The study, commissioned by SEC and KPMG, had earlier revealed consumer's attitudes and behaviours towards managing packaging waste. Majority of respondents felt that the government (75.2 percent) and NGOs (73 percent) have put in effort to reduce packaging waste in Singapore. Despite this, one in two respondents believe that upstream stakeholders such as the government and packaging producers, need to bear more responsibility in terms of eco-friendly packaging. This highlights the need for producers and regulators to continue to seek better upstream solution to improve the management of packaging waste in Singapore.

"Singapore's only landfill is set to reach its capacity by 2035. As a small island-city with limited land resources and waste incineration capabilities, we need to adopt innovative ways to curtail our waste production. We can no longer afford to only address packaging waste post-use but to look at its earlier stages. This calls for stakeholders, such as producers and regulators, to step in to reduce packaging output before it becomes waste," says Isabella Huang-Loh, SEC Chairman.

Key success factors producers and regulators should focus on

Based on the report findings, key factors for future success have been highlighted to help businesses focus their efforts on what matters.

1. Rethinking manufacturing

Now, more than ever, companies need to engage in R&D to rethink and redesign packaging. According to the report, 95 percent of consumers are inclined to buy eco-friendly packaging, but 53 percent will only purchase if it does not cost more. With consumers still price sensitive and innovation in its early stages, producers need to accelerate R&D and scale up solutions to drive down cost prices and increase adoption.

Overpackaging is also an area to be improved. 70 percent of consumers find that there is too much packaging for their purchases. These packaging often come in multi-layered plastic,

which is difficult to recycle as it requires the layers to be delaminated, or even virgin plastic. Business should look at utilising recycled plastics for their products or to introduce reuse and refill programmes to reduce the production of new plastics.

2. Government regulations

New technologies and innovation are mostly at their infancy stages, and this makes it challenging for producers to channel profits into R&D or to scale production. The industry can work more closely with the government to bring innovative solutions into the market, while providing ample financial support and infrastructure.

Introducing more policies to curtail the use of virgin plastics and regulate the industry's use of new plastics can help to ensure companies are improving their systems to align with sustainability guidelines.

3. Collaborations among upstream players

Fast-moving Consumer Groups (FMCG) have been making commitments to act on their packaging waste and improve on recyclability. This will require a close collaboration among upstream players such as recyclers and packaging converters and better infrastructure to respond to companies' higher recycling needs.

FMCGs can partner with suppliers to reduce their consumption of raw materials and increase the different types of substitutes for their production materials. Partnerships with environmental-advocacy groups to research for other ways to reduce waste can also be explored.

“With this report, we hope that more business will take a proactive approach in uncovering ways to tackle the waste management issues in Singapore. It is not the responsibility of one entity to help close the loop on packaging waste, rather it is a gargantuan task that requires the collaborative effort of the entire nation. While consumers can do their part to pick up greener habits when it comes to purchasing products with packaging, the onus is on the producers as they decide the output of packaging waste that goes into the market.,” says Jen Teo, Executive Director.

“Consumer attitudes on eco-friendly packaging are changing, placing corporates in a powerful position to influence purchase decisions and shape the packaging waste ecosystem in the coming years. Over a third (36 per cent) of respondents surveyed in SEC's and KPMG's latest study said that they turn to corporates as their trusted source of information on eco-labelling, along with government (29 per cent). Of the respondents who said that they rely on corporates, 22 per cent will only trust information that is directly displayed on a product label. Together with the government, companies will need to bear greater responsibility in addressing the information gaps in the market, so that consumers are empowered to make informed choices. This could involve mandatory eco-labelling on sustainable content of products



and boosting government-led consumer educational campaigns,” says Cherine Fok, Director, Sustainability Services and KPMG IMPACT, KPMG in Singapore.

Opportunities in transitioning to a blended circular-linear economy

Upstream solutions are crucial in making the transition to a blended circular-linear economy for waste management possible. Streamlining the process can not only reduce financial losses, but slow down material degradation with proper post-use disposal methods.

As the primary source of packaging, producers need to realise their impact on reducing the amount of packaging used. While waste will still be generated, there will be a significantly less amount of packaging being produced. Producers can also look to adopting processes to support closed loop recycling or reutilise by-products. All these efforts can reduce the environmental impact from the top of the chain and enable these companies to reap cost savings.

“In order for Singapore to track well in its journey to becoming a zero-waste nation, both upstream and downstream solutions have to take effect. Finding this balance is crucial in the years to come, as it requires collective industry effort as well as a shift in consumer behaviour for changes to happen. Despite the challenges, much opportunity lies ahead of the industry. Reducing pressures on the environment by decreasing the waste generated can improve resource productivity and help to nurture a competitive economy that constantly innovating greener solutions,” says Isabella Huang-Loh.

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About Singapore Environment Council

Established in 1995, the Singapore Environment Council (SEC) enables businesses in their sustainability journeys through its globally recognised environmental certification programme under the Global Ecolabelling Network (GEN). In line with the national targets outlined in the SG Green Plan 2030, SEC focuses on raising public awareness on sustainability issues and fosters capability and capacity building through Public Private People (3Ps) partnership. As a not-for-profit, non-governmental organisation (NGO), SEC is approved under the Institution of Public Character (IPC) which extends tax exemption to donors.

For details, please visit <https://www.sec.org.sg>

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