

PRESS RELEASE

ZSVR publishes first minimum standard for determining the recyclability of packaging

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Packaging must become more recycling-friendly and more eco-friendly in order to ensure that the relevant recycling targets defined in the Verpackungsgesetz (Packaging Act) can be met. An important tool is the minimum standard for determining the recyclability of packaging, which has just been published by the Zentrale Stelle Verpackungsregister (Central Agency Packaging Register – ZSVR) and is addressed to (dual) systems. The (dual) systems are the organisers of packaging recovery and recycling throughout Germany, through yellow bags, yellow bins and waste paper/glass collection containers. The systems are required to create financial incentives for recycling-friendly packaging design, based on the minimum standard. Recycling-friendly packaging must be better off in financial terms, to encourage companies to improve their packaging in the short term.

The new Verpackungsgesetz (Packaging Act) provides for demanding recycling targets, and a significant increase in these targets by 2022. For the targets to be met, packaging must be recyclable. Producer responsibility means that companies take the environmental impact of their product packaging into account as early as in the design process. The determination of recyclability then lies with the systems. It is based on the minimum standard. The systems also have the option of extending the minimum standard. This is an advantage for the systems, as they are required to provide annual evidence of their fulfilment of recycling targets defined for the packaging collected in the 'yellow bin/bags, glass containers and paper bins' system.

In June of the following year, the systems must report to the ZSVR how they complied with the requirements of the minimum standard. Ms Gunda Rachut, ZSVR Chair, said: "Packaging whose recyclable materials can return to the cycle through high-quality recycling, and from which new products and packaging can be produced, must enjoy financial benefits. These financial incentives are highly motivating for companies planning new filling lines to assume their producer responsibility for packaging – faster and more consistently."

As a forerunner to the minimum standard for determining the recyclability of packaging, the ZSVR published guidelines as early as 2018 to compound the impact of the Verpackungsgesetz. Based on these guidelines, and taking into account the results from two consultation procedures, the ZSVR has now developed a minimum standard in consultation with the Umweltbundesamt (German Environment Agency). The minimum standard addresses certain topics in more detail and more concrete terms. It contains technical additions, in particular for paper packaging, and considers new developments in packaging engineering. The Act requires the minimum standard to be reviewed on an annual basis to ensure that the high degree of innovation in this area can be adequately accounted for.

"Packaging is a key issue for companies. It is unfortunate that the debate surrounding plastics has given rise to many counter-productive developments. The minimum standard makes it clear that mixed-materials packaging, use of which is rising notably at present, often can only be recycled to a limited degree, or not at all. We hope to be able to contribute to an appropriate and ecological development", said Ms Rachut.

As per the Verpackungsgesetz, packaging may only be termed 'recyclable' if it can indeed be sorted out and recycled in practice. In addition, the packaging must not contain recycling incompatibilities. This includes, for example, packaging whose adhesive applications are not soluble in water or glass packaging that contains lead or barium. Details can be found in the minimum standard, which is published on the ZSVR website. Gunda Rachut: "Simple measures to optimise packaging design can often have a great impact. The premise, however, remains packaging prevention. Packaging should be reduced to a minimum, and only used where necessary."

About the ZSVR

The Stiftung Zentrale Stelle Verpackungsregister (Foundation Central Agency Packaging Register – ZSVR) is headquartered in Osnabrück. The founders are the Bundesvereinigung der Deutschen Ernährungsindustrie (Federation of German Food and Drink Industries – BVE), the Handelsverband Deutschland (German Retail Association – HDE), the IK Industrievereinigung Kunststoffverpackungen (German Plastics Association – IK), and the Markenverband (German Trade Mark Association). Since the Verpackungsgesetz (Packaging Act) entered into force on 1 January 2019, the ZSVR serves as an entrusted body to foster greater transparency and control in packaging recycling. To this end, the ZSVR maintains a register of all industrial and commercial companies under legal obligation, reconciles volumes between producers and systems, and provides for more recycling-friendly design by setting standards. Lawyer Gunda Rachut is the Chair of the Foundation.

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