

PRESS RELEASE

ZSVR's minimum standard advances ecological progress as an evolving recycling infrastructure spurs a surge in recovery volumes

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A new UBA study reveals: the share of recycled plastic and aluminium in liquid packaging board is increasing and recycling plants are recovering more film formats. The 2024 edition of the minimum standard for recycling-friendly packaging published by the Zentrale Stelle Verpackungsregister (Central Agency Packaging Register – ZSVR) helps the industrial and retail sectors to determine the recyclable content of their packaging more clearly and precisely.

The recent 'Packaging sorting and recovery practice' report by the German Environment Agency (UBA) concluded that recycling capacities for previously non-recyclable packaging materials, known as 'rejects', from liquid packaging board (LPB) recycling have risen considerably compared with the 2023 edition of the minimum standard. Sorting and recycling facilities were able to significantly increase high-quality mechanical recycling of plastic and aluminium shares. Additionally, sorting facilities for lightweight packaging are increasingly capable of sorting and making small-size flexible PE films available for recycling.

For the 2024 edition of the minimum standard, this means that providing individual evidence for plastic and aluminium shares in LPB will no longer be mandatory, but it will be recommended. Moreover, the ZSVR's Expert Committee has responded to the improved results in the lightweight packaging sorting facilities by removing the size criterion as a requirement for high-quality recycling of flexible plastic films.

Background: Every year, the UBA evaluates the sorting and recovery practice for packaging that typically accumulates as waste with private final consumers in Germany, investigating the likelihood that correctly disposed of packaging will be properly sorted and undergo high-quality recycling. The results of this investigation form the basis for developing the minimum standard, ensuring that technical advancements are promptly reflected.

2024 edition of the minimum standard provides for clarity and precision

The updated minimum standard clarifies that packaging components accumulating as waste separately must be assessed separately. This allows companies to determine the recyclability of packaging made up of various components in a more differentiated manner, in keeping with the planned European Packaging and Packaging Waste Regulation (PPWR).

In order to assess recycling capacities and incompatibilities of packaging, industrial and retail companies must take into account the target application from the outset. In other words, it must be clear where the recyclates will be used after extraction. That is why the 2024 edition of the minimum standard contains reference use cases for the individual material groups. It is another way that the ZSVR is addressing the industrial and retail sectors' need for greater clarity and precision. The participants in the consultation process preceding the minimum standard have welcomed the amendments.

Uniform requirements enhance user-friendliness

The ZSVR has also structured the respective provisions in the minimum standard and the overview of material-specific recycling incompatibilities in Appendix 3 more clearly. The harmonised materials terminology increases readability and user-friendliness. By specifying the requirements for individual evidence, the updated minimum standard makes applying it even easier.

Background: Individual evidence confirms whether a recycling infrastructure actually exists for an article of packaging as well as whether sorting facilities can identify that packaging, and also documents any recycling incompatibilities. This ensures that only packaging that can be recycled in the existing infrastructure is categorised as recyclable.

'Together, we advance ecological progress'

In addition to advancing ecological progress at the national level, the sixth edition of the minimum standard helps companies prepare for the upcoming PPWR, which is expected to start entering into force in mid-2026.

The PPWR will require companies from the industrial and retail sectors to ensure that packaging contains a certain share of recycled material. However, the recycle has to first be produced by the recycling process, which in turn requires recyclable packaging with a high share of recyclable content. The new minimum standard helps companies determine the recyclable content of packaging more precisely.

The German approach to updating the minimum standard could set a benchmark for Europe. Notably, it benefits from the involvement of over 30 experts from the ZSVR Expert Committee, covering every stage of the value chain and all types of materials. Following the annual public consultation, the ZSVR and the UBA revise the minimum standard before it is officially released. Gunda Rachut, Chair of the ZSVR, commented: *"By involving the entire value chain, we ensure there's a high level of subject matter expertise. This allows us to quickly discuss and integrate the latest packaging trends and technological developments. Only together can we drive ecological progress forward."*

The minimum standard helps companies from the industrial and retail sectors to optimise the national recycling infrastructure and increase recovery volumes. The German Verpackungsgesetz (Packaging Act) aims for high-quality recycling and is already preparing companies for the upcoming PPWR.

Zentrale Verpackungsregister (Central Agency Packaging Register – ZSVR)

Since the Verpackungsgesetz (Packaging Act) entered into force in 2019, the ZSVR has served as an entrusted body to foster greater transparency and control in the packaging recycling market. 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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