

FEEDBACK ON DEFINITIONS OF SINGLE USE PLASTICS DIRECTIVE (GUIDELINES SUPD_WP1_PART A B D 31022020)

UPM Biofore Beyond Fossils develops products to replace fossil-based materials

UPM-Kymmene Corporation (UPM) welcomes this opportunity to provide feedback to the consultation on the implementation guidelines of the SUP directive.

UPM is one of the leading forest industry companies in the world and we lead the forest-based bioindustry into a sustainable, innovation-driven, and exciting future across six business areas.

We create renewable and responsible solutions that replace fossil-based materials by making the most of residues and side streams. We rely on renewable and biodegradable raw materials to produce recyclable everyday items and materials.

Thanks to our global capabilities and strong position in the forest biomass sourcing chain, we're in a unique position to advance a circular economy in all our businesses. Moreover, we're constantly challenging ourselves by expanding into new end-use areas.

UPM has over nine (9) million tons of paper production capacity, almost four (4) million tons of pulp production and we are one of the leading producers of high-performing labelling materials for branding and promotion, informational labels, and labels with functionality.

Our position: UPM calls for clarity of definitions

UPM would like to refer to the position sent by **Confederation of European Paper Industries (CEPI)**, and state that we fully adhere to the remarks made by CEPI. In addition, however, we would like to make the following remarks.

In short, UPM considers that the definitions of "plastic" and what constitutes "a main structural component" are too broad. This means the draft guidance on SUPD is not in line with the objective of the SUPD and does not promote the transition towards circular economy with innovative and sustainable business models and products and materials.

What is the ultimate purpose and goal of SUPD?

Objective of the SUPD is to prevent and reduce the impact of plastics on the environment, in particular to the aquatic environment as well as to promote circular economy with innovative and sustainable products and materials. With this goal in mind we need clear and consistent definitions.

In an effort to promote sustainability and circularity of packaging products, industry has developed new surface treatments for paper and board products that are easier/easy to recycle as well as decomposing in marine ecosystems without causing long term littering issues. For the sake of consistency, coatings of paper products should be considered analogue to painting. Paint also seldom serves only a decorative purpose, but protects the painted object from premature corrosion, thus acting as e.g. oxygen barrier. The chemical composition of coatings used for papers is in many ways similar to those of paints. Coatings usually consist of pigment and binder system where no single component provides the functionality alone, or as a separate layer or phase. The binder material polymers both in paints, as well as paper coatings can be of synthetic nature, but also bio-based polymers that may be industrially fermented. For these reasons, components of paper coatings such as synthetic binders, should not be considered as main structural components.

The packaging products derived from these materials often find use as food containers, packets and wrappers for food wrappers. The paper and board products used for these applications would certainly need protective coatings to work optimally in the intended end use. The main structural and load bearing component of these products is the cellulose based layered construction. The protective coating should not categorically render the product SUP product.

The proposed interpretation means that paper products containing even infinitely small amounts of synthetic polymer will be defined as SUP based on the “intended use” of the product regardless if the polymer is a main structural component. If any functionality of synthetic or chemically modified natural polymer is considered to lead to the material defined as SUP, then the structural requirement in terminology has been overlooked. In the proposed interpretation of SUPD, any functionality of synthetic polymer in the final product would render the product equally negative as any polyolefin extrusion coating, for example. That can’t be the intended purpose of the definition.

Clear and consistent terminology is essential for industry and consumers

The term “main structural component”, that is the original wording in the directive, would suggest the material used should be acting in a main role in the suggested structure, therefore it would, as structural, need to be at least load bearing, and from a share standpoint not be a marginal additive. If any component of the packaging product would qualify as structural, then the whole attribute “structural” could be taken away as an unnecessary definition. All paper and board packaging are made with renewable and recyclable cellulosic fiber material as the main structural component. The use of polymers in coatings for conventional printing and writing grades has been an established practice and always for a purpose = function. The share of synthetic polymers is by design so small that it does not prevent the recycling of the paper packaging with the paper stream.

Mixing the two terms “structural” and “functional” would lead to a misinterpretation, which might have consequences with interpretation of the current legislation, would create challenges for packaging design, lead to complications in the recycling and recovery systems and ultimately may lead to overall unintended consequences in future legislation.

It is very concerning if using the broad “functional” terminology (with any type of functionality of synthetic or natural polymer that have been chemically modified) would lead to paper packaging being labelled as plastic. With shrinking fiber streams on the printing and writing realm, the industry would be more than happy to make use of recovered packaging materials. So, such type of paper packaging labelled as a SUP product might be left out of collection and sorting of packaging containers, reduce the amount of circulated materials, which would be counterproductive for the objectives of the Directive to promote circular economy with innovative and sustainable products and materials.

Finally, paper has high recycling rate and products can be circulated in existing paper recycling systems. The use of paper packaging solutions strongly supports the sustainability and circularity objectives of the European Union. Industry is committed to developing increasingly circular and environmental sound products for consumers. We consider that our products should be considered as part of the solution in reducing the impact of plastics to the environment.