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## IS GREEN PACKAGING BAD?

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By Andrew Joseph | February 19, 2009



At a recent PCD (Perfumes, Cosmetics & Design) Congress held in Paris on February 3 & 4, 2009, the topic of avoiding green packaging was broached.

Stéphane Guilbert, a professor of biopolymer science and engineering put forth the proposition that green

packaging materials have their own nasty consequences.

He cited polylactic acid (PLA)—the corn-starch base used as an alternative to PET (polyethylene terephthalate) packaging, noting how the corn used to create it is often derived from genetically modified (GM) corn starch. The key word in that sentence is "often" — not "always". He felt that green consumers are not fans of Frankenstein (GM) foods, creating a moral dilemma.

He did correctly state that farmers who are switching their crops from the less expensive food crop to the PLA version have helped inflate the cost of corn-based food products in developing nations.

He also said that while the greener packaging materials may indeed be biodegradable or compostable, they tend to require special treatment upon disposal to actually make them biodegrade — and if that treatment is not readily available —often the case—the packaging does not biodegrade—so why use it? He also feared that consumers knowing that a package is biodegradable may be come less inclined to dispose of the product properly, creating litter while figuring it will decompose quickly. Guilbert also noted that PLA and other bio plastics are inferior to conventional materials, as these are usually highly water sensitive and can lose its shape at temperatures over 60 Celsius. And while that may pose a problem when trying to apply an after-dinner perfume while out in the Gobi Desert, it can also mean the package could deteriorate if left in a sealed car out in the sun—perhaps not an ideal situation for anyone, no matter how much they slather on the perfume.

Though the professor makes valid points, I believe that green packaging has its place within our packaging mad culture. While green packaging may have its limits relative to conventional packaging, no one in the green industry has come out and said it is the cure-all for all your packaging needs.

What it is, however, is a start. While the problems inherent with green packaging are noted above, it is still a young industry and it would be foolish of us to assume that what we consider green packaging today is what green packaging will be tomorrow. The problems are noted. Better education is required of the average consumer — not just of the green one—to realize how to properly dispose of all packaging—but that goes for our municipal dumps too... they need to step up and learn how to effectively dispose of this new type of packaging.

Green packaging may have its problems, but it is NOT a step in the wrong direction. Somewhere awaiting the next-generation of green packaging.

Andrew Joseph