

Sustainable Innovation Portrait

Barbara Grossmann, Beauty Care, Germany

Barbara Grossmann, Packaging Engineer in Henkel's Beauty Care business unit, explains how the use of 25-percent recycled aluminum in Fa deodorant spray cans could help Henkel save as much as 10,000 metrics tons of CO₂ per year.

Barbara, please tell us about the recycled aluminum in Fa deodorant spray cans. Why is this important?

Smelting primary aluminum is a very energy intensive process. Using recycled aluminum is, by comparison, significantly less energy intensive. So the basic idea was to reduce our energy and aluminum consumption as well as our carbon emissions by using 25-percent recycled aluminum in our Fa deodorant spray cans.

We launched a proof-of-concept project on the use of recycled aluminum in 2013 and completed the project earlier this year. As a result, we expect to save more than 1,000 tons of CO₂ in 2014 alone – and more in the future.

How does the new Fa packaging compare to its predecessor?

As I mentioned, we can conserve energy and reduce carbon emissions by using 25-percent recycled aluminum rather than primary aluminum for our Fa aerosol cans.

An additional benefit of using recycled content is increased packaging strength. The recycled aluminum is actually stronger than primary aluminum. This enables us to reduce the thickness and the weight of the aerosol cans and further reduce CO₂ emissions during the manufacturing and logistics processes.

Overall Henkel could save up to 10,000 metrics tons of CO₂ emissions per year thanks to this packaging innovation.

How was the idea for this innovation first developed?

We are always looking for opportunities to reduce the environmental footprint of our products.

In this case, we developed and conducted the pilot project in collaboration with Ball Corporation, one of our key packaging suppliers. Working with Ball was a good fit for us, because – like Henkel – they are deeply committed to the topic of sustainability.

Ball supported the project with their knowledge of raw materials; aluminum slugs, which are used to manufacture aerosol cans; and aerosol can production technology. Henkel led the development with our deep expertise on aerosol packaging and filling production lines.

From that standpoint, I would describe it as a win-win situation.

Will consumers notice a difference?

No, I don't expect that consumers will notice any difference aside from the weight. The cans with recycled content are roughly 10% lighter than their predecessors, despite being made out of a stronger material.

The packaging and the product itself will continue to perform at a very high level. That was really important to us.

What advice on innovative thinking can you share with others?

Work together. Innovation does not happen in isolation.

We need to continuously challenge our conventional technologies and co-operate with our suppliers and partners on new innovative solutions. I think that working together is the best way to reach our sustainability goals and remain competitive as a business.