PPA'S MAGAZINE PLASTIC WRAPPING GUIDELINES (Revised July 2018)

The challenges of single use plastics

In recent months single-use plastics have become the most prominent environmental concern for the general public. There is growing awareness regarding the low recycling rates for used plastic packaging whilst the recent Blue Planet II series has highlighted the impact that used plastics can have on the environment if they are not disposed of appropriately.

These concerns are reflected in emerging policy actions and proposals from government and in the challenging commitments being made and actions being taken throughout industry.

Nonetheless, for many applications plastics are a highly effective and efficient material. One such example is magazine wrapping. Plastic film is low cost, light-weight, flexible, strong, water-proof, transparent, sealable and printable. These characteristics make it the preferred material currently available for wrapping magazines for retail presentation and mailing.

Implications for publishers

Through the Sustainability Action Group (SAG), the PPA and its membership have been monitoring the use of plastic wrapping within our magazine supply chains for several years. The group has dedicated resources to reducing usage, investigating alternative materials and promoting recycling of plastic wrap wherever possible. Subsequent best practice has been communicated and shared across the industry through the availability of best practice guidelines for magazine plastic wrapping.

As the use of plastic wrap has come into sharp focus in recent months, the PPA has issued these updated guidelines to reflect the fast-changing situation. All magazine publishers are encouraged to consider these guidelines and adopt best-practice and share knowledge wherever possible. The guidelines will continue to be updated as new learning come to the fore, so publishers and other stakeholders are encouraged to check the guidelines regularly and/or participate in Sustainability Action Group activities wherever possible.

PPA Guidance

a) Fossil-based polyethylene (PE) and polypropylene (PP) are currently the main materials used for wrapping magazines and are likely to be a prominent solution in the industry in the foreseeable future. If your business continued to use PE and/or PP, you should participate in the on-pack recycling logo (OPRL) scheme. The OPRL is a scheme to encourage consumers to recycle their packaging materials correctly. This is achieved by incorporating the appropriate OPRL label, which is specific to each packaging material and format. The details of how to join the OPRL scheme and the labels that should accompany your magazine wrapping in provided in Annex 1 below.
b) Never use oxy-degradable films. Oxy-degradable films have been promoted as an alternative to single-use plastic films for many applications, but the case for oxy-degradables has not yet been corroborated with sufficient and/or conclusive independent scientific evidence.
c) Other alternatives to fossil-based plastic wrap are emerging and these are being investigated, and sometimes adopted, by individual publishers on a case-by-case basis. Some of these alternatives include: bio-based PE; compostable starch-based films; paper wrapping; and even paper envelopes as an alternative for lower circulation subscription titles. There are environmental pros and cons for each of these solutions and therefore before making the choice to use alternative materials, consider the following aspects and discuss these with your supplier:

- Bio-based PE is polyethylene manufactured from sugarcane rather than fossil resources. The sugarcane is converted into a bio-ethanol using a fermentation process. This can then be used in traditional polyethylene polymerization processes to make the various grades of PE. Bio-based PE is considered a "drop-in" material (i.e. it can be used as a direct replacement to fossil-based PE with no changes to processes or properties. As such, bio-based PE is not biodegradable, but can be recycled alongside other PE film where appropriate collection and reprocessing facilities exist. However, sometime film producers may include some fossil-based PE plus other additives in their film in order to achieve the desired material properties for a specific application. The biggest producer of bio-based PE is Braskem. They producer bio-based PE in Brazil, using sugarcane grown in Brazil according to strict sustainability criteria. Converters in Europe will purchase bio-based PE pellets from Braskem and convert this material into films in Europe. If using bio-based PE, publishers should check the source and sustainability credentials of the material with their film suppliers.
- In the last decades, starch has been evaluated in its film-forming ability as a potential substitute for various packaging applications. Films can be manufactured from starch from any source, such as potato starch, corn starch, rice starch, etc. Starch can be classified as either virgin (i.e. derived from crops specifically grown for the purpose of starch production) or reclaimed (i.e. as a by-product from existing agricultural and/or food processing operations). Starch-based films are biodegradable and may also be compostable, but they are not recyclable. If starch-based films are used, these should be clearly marked as biodegradable and/or compostable as appropriate. These materials are not wanted in the recycling stream as they can have a negative impact on the recycled product. It is also very important to note that, in order to achieve the properties necessary for a selected application, many starch-based films incorporate biodegradable/compostable fossil-based petro-chemcials, often in high proportions. Whilst these non-bio-based ingredients to not affect biodegradability of the films, some of these can have a very high fossil carbon impact during production and will also release fossil carbon to the atmosphere at end-of-life. Thus, there may be a trade-off between biodegradability and carbon impact to consider. This could be particularly true of materials are home composted in poor composting conditions, which could lead to emissions of methane, a greenhouse gas with a high global warming potential.
- Paper wrapping is an emerging technique which is being offered as an alternative to plastic wrapping for subscription magazines. For lower circulation titles, envelops can also be a viable option. Paper is an established bio-based material with an established and successful recycling system. If paper is used, it should be sourced from sustainably managed forests and appropriate labelling should encourage consumers to recycle the materials.

ANNEX 1: OPRL scheme

The On-Pack Recycling Label scheme aims to deliver a simple, consistent and UK-wide recycling message on retailer and brand packaging to help consumers recycle more material correctly, more often. To use the label, publishers are required to pay an annual fee to cover the costs of administering the scheme. The scheme is administered by The On-Pack Recycling Label Ltd, which is a not-for-profit company limited by guarantee. Any surpluses are reinvested in their activities to promote recycling of packaging.

Full details about how to join the OPRL scheme are available at www.oprl.org.uk. Please note that there is an introductory offer for PPA members - 15 months for the price of 12 months.

The label can be printed on the plastic film, carrier sheet or in the magazine itself. Examples of the appropriate OPRL labels are given below.

Label for PE

PE is the standard ‘poly’ used for carrier bags, mailing film and some retail magazine bagging. WRAP has worked with large retailers to develop the collection and recycling of this material. Publishers participating in OPRL can encourage consumers to recycle their PE at retailer collection points.

Label for PP

This is the material used for some retail magazine bags. Currently PP film it is not collected for recycling by retailers or local authorities. Therefore, the PPA recommends its members to ensure that consumers not to contaminate the recycling waste stream with PP by using the following OPRL label.