

What is a Sustainable Packaging System?

What does the term *sustainable packaging* mean to you? The obvious answer is that it is comprised of sustainable materials but is that enough to qualify a package as sustainable? Is sustainable packaging as simple as using compostable material or does true sustainability presume a cultural change?

Sustainable packaging is steadily gaining recognition fueled by organizations such as the Sustainable Packaging Coalition (SPC) and retail stores such as Wal-Mart and Costco. Wal-Mart voluntarily adopted ecological accountability by implementing a "packaging scorecard" which grades suppliers based on the amount of recycled material in their packaging and the environmental impact of their packaging.

These are dramatic improvements but there are other elements to true sustainability. For example, you might ask if the packaging was shipped to the store by bio-fueled trucks or what the store is doing to operate more efficiently.

Additionally, let's consider the machines that make the sustainable packaging. Do they qualify as sustainable? To consider a package worthy of the "sustainable packaging" classification, one must also consider the methods by which it is made, transported, sold, and recycled.

As more sustainable materials are developed, requirements for a method of sealing secure and consumer-friendly packages drove Sencorp's development of the EnviroShell Shuttle Sealer. When Sencorp contemplated building a sealer capable of sealing sustainable materials, the company looked beyond the obvious and created a machine based on sustainable objectives. Sencorp ensured the EnviroShell Shuttle Sealer would fit neatly into the sustainable packaging "big picture" which would enable companies to create an overall sustainable packaging process.

Sencorp engineers accomplished this goal by evaluating every component, eliminating all wastes, decreasing power requirements, increasing flexibility, and increasing efficiency. The following list demonstrates the result of those efforts:

- ✚ 50% smaller "foot print" to comparable machines
- ✚ 40% lower compressed air consumption to comparable machines
- ✚ 50% faster throughput to comparable machines
- ✚ Designed to seal latest generation of sustainable warehouse club packaging
- ✚ Designed to seal sustainable plastics including PET, RPET, and PLA
- ✚ Maximum seal area 34" x 24" for a single package or 17" x 24" each x two packages
- ✚ Capable of running two different package configurations at the same time
- ✚ Twenty-five ton seal press capable of "crush" sealing coated corrugated board-to-board
- ✚ Top and bottom heated platens
- ✚ Dual operator feature for reduced cycle time and increased throughput
- ✚ Faster cycle speeds achieved by top and bottom heat and industry leading seal force
- ✚ Ten minute change over part-to-part
- ✚ Tool-less changeover
- ✚ Auto shut-height adjustment

Sencorp also took into consideration shipping implications when designing the machine. The smaller machine configuration reduces shipping costs and fuel consumption by eliminating the need for dedicated shipments.

Ecological responsibility is not a new concept to Sencorp. Located on Cape Cod, Massachusetts, the company has implemented significant ecological standards to warrant their continued welcome in the environmentally sensitive area. In addition to a 2006 project to reduce plant power consumption, Sencorp continues to employ manufacturing best practices to reduce wastes focusing first on those with an environmental impact.

The Sencorp example clearly illustrates that in order for packaging to be truly sustainable, the goal should be for a core *sustainable system*. As the Sustainable Packaging Coalition highlights, packaging sustainability must be more than the end result. All aspects of creating, transporting, selling, and disposing of the packaging should fit into sustainability objectives. After all, is it really progress if you tear down a forest to plant a tree?

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