

Clive Bowers, CEO of Smurfit Kappa Corrugated (UK), took over the leadership of the CPI's Corrugated Sector in December 2008. In this opinion piece, he shares his thoughts on.....



The need for clarity

These are very difficult times for the corrugated packaging industry as for everyone else. As individual businesses, we all need to focus even more clearly on what we do best and how we can help our customers. As an industry, we need to be alert to the kind of muddled thinking which has been emerging in the environmental debate and get back to rigorous examination of real facts rather than myths.

However, difficult times also provide an opportunity to do things differently and more efficiently. The corrugated packaging industry has a big role to play in helping its customers become more efficient and improve their environmental credentials. We do this by providing new and better designs that have a major beneficial impact across the supply chain and in store.

We have a good story to tell and we are determined to tell it. It's becoming ever more important to say what we mean clearly, and with support from hard facts, because, as an industry, we have to stand up to a lot of nonsense which pours out from all quarters.

There has been a lot of recent coverage in the national press concerning an apparent stockpiling of recovered paper. The reality is that this problem only arises with a small percentage of poor quality recovered paper. Good quality recovered paper is still in demand and we expect this to continue.

A lot of hot air is vented on the subject of excessive packaging. It's true that there are the occasional examples of over packaging but these really are few and far between. In the vast majority of cases, packaging is entirely appropriate for the goods concerned and product wastage – which carries a greater impact than the packaging – is avoided.

Then there's the whole area of comparisons between materials and different types of packaging. I believe it is important to have a robust debate about which packaging material is best in specific cases. We need to be on our guard when a company produces a 'research report' that sings the environmental praises of the materials the company happens to sell! When it comes to considering carbon footprints, we need complete transparency of all the issues and we must be certain we are comparing like with like. It sounds obvious but in 2009 we need to watch out for the spurious comparison as the hugely important environmental debate is too important to be hijacked by unscientific and biased information.

Recently, the CPI Corrugated Sector has been stepping up its communication to important groups such as Members of Parliament and industry journalists. We want to remind people that we are an essential industry. We punch above our weight. The industry employs 10,000 people in 150 sites across the UK and our products account for over a third of all packaging in this country. That's why we want to make sure our voice is clearly heard in 2009 – calling for clarity, transparency and integrity in all the vigorous arguments we are sure to have, and emphasising that corrugated packaging is good for business and society!

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For more information, please contact Andrew Barnetson, Corrugated Sector Body Manager, on 07775 771662 or email abarnetson@paper.org.uk

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Associated Imagery

Clive Bowers, CEO of Smurfit Kappa Corrugated (UK) and Chairman of CPI's Corrugated Sector.

Notes to Editors

- For additional information on the UK paper industry, in the first instance, please contact Catherine Waterfield, External Affairs Coordinator, on 01793 889612 or email cwaterfield@paper.org.uk. Alternatively, please visit: <http://www.paper.org.uk>.
- CPI is the voice of the paper industry in the UK, representing papermakers, tissue manufacturers, corrugated packaging producers and recovered paper merchants.
- Corrugated packaging is a versatile material used for a very wide range of food, grocery and manufactured products from light bulbs to engine blocks.
- An unsurpassed level of flexibility and efficiency means that it can be readily tailored to suit the rapidly changing demands of the supply chain.
- A superb environmental record, with its raw materials coming from a sustainable resource, and an impressive recycling rate that saves an area of board the size of Greater London from landfill every four months.