Christmas: the time of gift giving

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For many, the act of gift-giving is a central part of their Christmas celebrations. According to Christian tradition, it symbolises the offering of gifts by the Three Wise Men to baby Jesus. As such, our gatherings with loved ones are often characterised by piles of neatly packaged presents under the tree.

It feels good to be generous, and to receive thoughtful gifts ourselves. There is no better time spent than writing a personal Christmas card to loved ones or wrapping gifts listening to your favourite Christmas songs. Traditions like these are what make Christmas special for so many people around the world. However, there's another side to the festive period that is becoming ever-more worrying for those concerned about the environment. While the focus tends to be on ensuring everything is perfect in the run-up to Christmas, what happens once all the presents have been opened, the wrapping paper strewn across the floor, the items unboxed and the packaging discarded?

Across Europe, we consume more products and therefore dispose of more packaging material during the festive period than at any other time of the year. In the UK alone, 227,000 miles of wrapping paper ends up in household rubbish bins instead of being recycled, while 1 billion Christmas cards are also thrown out. In years gone by, these might have been dismissed as an unfortunate, but inevitable, consequence of rampant consumerism, however, this is no longer the case. In recent times, as sustainability has wrestled its way to the top of the agenda for both brands and consumers, the number of environmentally-friendly packaging solutions has rocketed, offering a clear path towards a green Christmas.

This trend has forged a special relationship between Christmas and one such sustainable packaging solution – cartonboard. Many popular Christmas items, from advent calendars to Christmas cards and gift boxes are packaged in cartonboard, and with good reason. As well as its functional qualities, such as the protection it provides and the many opportunities for printing and embossing, brands and consumers are increasingly drawn to cartonboard's ecological benefits.

Made from wood chippings from sustainably managed forests, or from recycled paper and board, cartonboard is renewable, recyclable and biodegradable. A recent study by researchers at the

University of TU Graz concluded that it can be recycled in excess of 25 times, making it the most environmentally friendly packaging material and the perfect example of the circular economy. What's more, cartonboard possesses by far the highest recycling rate of all packaging materials, reaching 84.2%[1] in 2018, testament to the efficient recovery and recycling systems in place across Europe.

Cartonboard's remarkably low environmental footprint presents an exciting opportunity to significantly reduce our 'unfriendly' waste this Christmas. As well as opting to buy gifts and products from brands that package their products in cartonboard to preserve the earth's natural resources at the point of production, Pro Carton also encourages the responsible recycling of waste, the reuse of boxes and other packaging forms for future use.

The carton Industry is working closely with recyclers all over Europe to build up an efficient, easy-to-understand and trustworthy infrastructure to collect, sort and recycle packaging, that will ultimately lead to an increase in overall recycling rates. Indeed, if given to the local recycler, consumers can trust that all the cartons and cartonboard that they buy or are gifted at Christmas, will be put back into the supply chain and made into new packaging material, making them an important part in a truly circular business model.

As the most wonderful time of the year approaches, Pro Carton is calling on all consumers to give a gift to the environment and recycle their carton and paper materials this Christmas.

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