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Dear Santa, please make Christmas packaging more sustainable

A new survey of consumers living in Europe reveals that sustainable packaging and the ability to easily recycle are key considerations when choosing presents this Christmas, with two in three (65%) of European shoppers looking for products in sustainable packaging for all or some of the gifts they purchase.

The study, on behalf of Pro Carton, the European Association of Carton and Cartonboard manufacturers, asked more than 5,000¹ consumers about their Christmas shopping preferences. It formed part of a wide-ranging survey into consumer views on the biggest issues impacting climate change today – from deforestation to transportation and packaging, against other global concerns such as the war in Ukraine, Covid-19 and the economic crisis.

When it comes to what kind of packaging shoppers prefer, the study reveals that shoppers across Europe much prefer to buy gifts packaged in paper and cartonboard (57%), with a further 17% preferring corrugated cardboard. In fact, paper, cartonboard and corrugated cardboard are streets ahead of other packaging forms, such as plastics (4.2%), Styrofoam (2.1%) and foil (2.6%).

Despite this year's expenditure squeeze, many shoppers are prepared to pay extra for more sustainably packaged presents. Across Europe, a third say they would pay 0-5% more (34%), while a quarter would pay 5-10% more (24%) and a small number (2.2%) would pay 20%+ extra.

¹ At least 1,000 consumers in the UK, France, Spain, Germany, and Italy



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The good news for the environment is that once the festivities are over most shoppers in all five countries polled are keen to do what they can to recycle. A total of 56% of respondents said they would take the time to separate out all the waste and recycle what they can. People in Germany appear to have slightly more intent to recycle (60%) and those in the UK slightly less (51%).

Winfried Muehling, General Manager, Pro Carton says: “It is heartening to see that, despite the multiple difficulties faced this year, shoppers haven’t forgotten their concerns about the environment.

“It is clear that the majority of shoppers want to do the right thing, even during the busiest times of the year. However, it is up to brands and retailers to help them to do that, not by only using sustainable packaging options, but also by clearly labelling them. Shoppers are keen to separate and recycle their waste but without the right information are more likely to just throw perfectly recyclable items straight into their general waste streams.

Once cartons, which could be recycled, end up in general waste streams, their valuable fibers are lost for good. Securing each carton back into carton recycling streams is critical for reuse – as the fibres found in cartons can be recycled up to 25 times with little to no loss of integrity. Furthermore, separate collection is key to reach the industry’s ambition of a 90% recycling rate for fibre-based packaging in Europe.

“We are clearly going in the right direction, but there is still so much to do to achieve a truly circular economy and I call on manufacturers, brands and retailers to continue to pull out all the stops and step up to make the changes needed...this year and into the future.”

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