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## Expanded Polystyrene Industry Reacts to IKEA Announcement

### EPS Industry Alliance & European Manufacturers of EPS Issue Formal Statement

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Last month, IKEA issued a press release from CEO and President Peter Agnefjäll stating that they have “phased oil-based polystyrene” from their flat packs to be replaced by fiber-based packaging, specifically naming expanded polystyrene (EPS). The reason? Because it reduces EPS use by 8,000 tonnes a year, or, “more than half of what can be in the Empire State Building”. They did not cite any specific benefit, but merely relied on the public perception that paper is uniformly a superior environmental choice.

It is commonplace for corporations to link eco-advancements directly to the elimination of plastic, often in the name of unfounded environmental responsibility. Global consumers should expect more from IKEA, which holds a long standing public image of environmental stewardship, especially given the fact that their brand has a strong tie to sustainability. When employing high level sustainability and environmental stewardship as a selling point doesn't that make a company more accountable to make truly beneficial changes that are backed up by science, sound math and comprehensive life cycle analysis.

In this instance, it is especially disconcerting to see IKEA resort leading into environmental delusion, making it appear as if 8,000 tonnes of EPS are a significant waste reduction with no tangible point of reference or offer any meaningful information on the environmental trade-offs of paper alternatives. In reality, 8,000 tonnes may or may not fill the Empire State Building, as EPS is produced in a variety of densities – this means that the volume to weight ratio may vary from 18 gr/L to 90 gr/L. IKEA fails to offer any point of reference to what percentage of EPS in their distribution chain they are phasing out or what environmental improvements will occur from using fiber-based packaging.

IKEA is aware all packaging materials – whether paper, plastic or reusable containers – have an environmental impact. The belief that paper is better than plastic is not based on scientific fact, but rather on misconceptions about how plastic products are made, how landfills work, the incidence of plastic litter and how non-biodegradable products negatively impact the planet. Research has proven that paper production typically consumes more resources, has a higher carbon footprint and generates significantly more waste than plastic, even when recycling is taken into account<sup>2</sup>.

In response to an earlier declaration by IKEA that they may discontinue the use of EPS in lieu of EcoCradle® – a mycelium-based packaging material –EPS-IA repeatedly attempted to contact IKEA to offer science based

information on expanded polystyrene. Regardless that other Fortune 500 companies making similar announcements were unsuccessful with EcoCradle® as a viable substitute for EPS, IKEA falsely lead its customers to believe it was making a positive move for environmental stewardship. Despite both the U.S. and European EPS organizations contacting IKEA to discuss a full environmental analysis, IKEA declined to communicate at any level, showing a disregard for all available information.

In order to make truly valuable environmental progress, legislative product bans and corporate packaging boycotts must be thought based and not emotionally charged decisions. Emotions about a particular material will not go far to improve our sustainable future. In many cases polystyrene may not be the correct environmental choice, but it is impossible to say unless measured against real world metrics and achievable goals. Every bit counts so we all need to make it count – really count.

1. 2004-05 NYC Residential & Street Basket Waste Characterization Study, R.W. Beck
2. Life Cycle Inventory of Packaging Options for Shipment of Retail Mail Order Soft Goods, Franklin Associates, April 2004

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