Personal Care Packaging:

Safety, Convenience & Sustainability

American Institute for Packaging and the Environment
Delivering on Expectations

Shampoo & Conditioner, Cosmetics, Toothpaste, Soap & Body Wash, Shaving Cream, Hand lotion. All are part of our daily routines. We invest a lot in them because we expect a lot from them. In fact, Americans spend around $50 billion annually for beauty & personal care products, more than $200 per adult.¹

To provide us with the proper return on these investments, personal care companies must ensure that the products we buy are fresh, effective, protected, easy to use, safe, informative, and sustainable. (We define “sustainable” as maximizing economic, environmental, and social value while minimizing waste.) The most effective way to meet these needs is by optimizing the packaging in which personal care products are contained.

Sustainable Packaging for Personal Care

Job 1: Product Protection
Lifecycle studies consistently draw the same conclusion: From an economic and environmental standpoint, the most important role of packaging is damage protection.² The reason is straightforward: When looked at from a larger systems perspective, the product generally accounts for at least 90% of the total environmental impact and the package for the remaining 10% (or less).

Job 2: Consumer Protection
Most personal care packaging includes an inner seal which acts as a safety barrier and prevents leakage prior to opening. This barrier also protects from malicious tampering in retail stores, warehouses, and during shipping. It also ensures that small children cannot inadvertently access products not designed or suited for their use.

Job 3: Product Freshness and Effectiveness
Cosmetics and other personal care products are expensive. After purchase, we expect them to be fresh and highly effective - and we expect them to stay that way for a long time.

Ensuring that we get what we pay for is one of the primary functions of packaging. For example:

- Barrier layers ensure that sensitive formulations are not exposed to air or moisture, which could cause spoilage.
- Caps, lids and other closures also act as barriers.
- Date codes indicate which are the freshest products on the shelf.

Job 4: Dosing and Dispensing
Using too much or too little of a product is economically and environmentally wasteful. Smart packaging ensures that we can dispense just the right amount of product. Examples include pumps, measuring caps, and single dose applicators.

Job 5: Education
Why should I use this product? When should I use it, how often should I use it, and how much should I use it? How do I know if it’s working? Does it contain any allergens? What should I do if I use too much or mistakenly apply it to sensitive areas? These and other important questions are answered on packaging and packaging inserts. Thus, packaging helps build confidence by providing information necessary for purchase and use.

Packaging and Waste Minimization

All packaging materials have environmental benefits: Metal containers are among the top recycled items in EPA surveys.³ Paperboard, plastic, and aluminum containers offer significant source reduction value. Thus, each material provides substantial environmental benefits in line with the EPA’s widely accepted waste management hierarchy:⁴

Waste Management Hierarchy

Source Reduction & Reuse - Packaging made from plastics, paper, and foil provide significant source reduction benefits. Many glass containers are reusable, as well as recyclable.
Recycling - While recycling of beauty products has been slow to catch on, there are now free recycling programs for hair care, skin care, and cosmetic product packaging. There are currently 17,500 collection locations!⁵
Energy Recovery - Energy recovery is focused on rigid and flexible plastic and paper containers, as they have significant energy value. Municipal interest in this option is growing.⁶
What We All Can Do

• **Think About Where and How Products Are Used**
  For example, when using soap, think water conservation: Don’t quite fill up the tub. Take shorter showers. Turn water off when brushing your teeth. These simple steps can have a big impact when trying to conserve resources.

• **Buy Smaller Sizes When Trying New Products**
  Most people like to try a variety of personal care products before deciding on their favorites. To reduce waste, start by purchasing trial sizes and then buying larger ones once you’re satisfied with the product.

• **Buy for the Occasion**
  When traveling by plane, carry on containers must be three oz. or less. Purchase accordingly, so larger sizes are not confiscated and thus wasted. (Also, bringing along favorite products will reduce the chances of wasting the hotel’s single use hospitality items.)

• **Recycle Metal, Glass, and Plastic Containers**
  Keep a small bag, bin or box in the bathroom vanity for recyclables. For plastic containers, check the recycling symbols and contact your local recycling agency or city government to assure that these are accepted.

• **Purchase Favorite Products in Refillable Systems**
  Refillable hand soap, shampoo and conditioner systems are becoming increasingly popular. You will save money and packaging.

• **Close. Re-Seal. Re-Cap!**
  Products won’t spill or spoil.

---

1 Includes statistics provided by the U.S. Census Bureau and Statista.
2 Oregon Department of Environmental Quality, Life Cycle Inventory of Packaging Options for Shipment of Retail Mail-Order Soft Goods.