Today's Aerosols: An Environmentally Responsible Choice

As President of the New Zealand Aerosol Association, I understand the scepticism that often surrounds aerosol products. However, it is essential to separate myth from fact to recognise the true environmental benefits that aerosol spray cans offer.

1. Superior Efficiency and Minimal Waste

One of the most compelling arguments in favour of aerosols is their efficiency. Aerosols are designed to deliver a precise, targeted amount of product with each spray, minimising waste. This controlled release not only ensures that the consumer uses the product efficiently but also reduces the frequency of repurchase, leading to less packaging waste overall. For instance, aerosol cans often last longer than non-aerosol alternatives, as they maintain their contents' potency and usability for extended periods. This efficiency translates to fewer products being discarded prematurely, contributing to less environmental burden.

2. Recyclability and Resource Conservation

Aerosol cans are predominantly made of steel or aluminium, materials that are 100% recyclable and which are easily separated from other recyclate. The recycling process for these metals is highly efficient, conserving natural resources and reducing energy consumption.

In New Zealand, until earlier this year, steel and aluminium recycling was widely supported, with most local councils accepting empty aerosol cans in their kerbside recycling programs. Recycling these materials significantly reduces the need for virgin resources, which is a critical component of sustainable development and is part of the reason why, as an association, we support moves by groups like the New Zealand Food and Grocery Council to seek their reinstatement to kerbside collections.

Recycling aluminium saves around 95% of the energy required to produce it from raw materials. Similarly, recycling steel saves approx. 60% of the energy used in new steel production[#]. By opting for aerosol products, consumers are participating in a cycle that promotes resource conservation and minimizes the environmental footprint if they are recycled.

See https://circulareconomy.europa.eu/platform/sites/default/files/euric_metal_recycling_factsheet.pdf

3. Safe and Controlled Propellant Systems

Modern aerosol sprays use propellants that are both safe for the environment and - when used as directed - human health. The phase-out of chlorofluorocarbons (CFCs) in the 1980s marked a significant victory for environmental protection, and today's aerosol products use alternatives like natural hydrocarbons and compressed gases such as nitrogen, CO_2 and compressed air which have a significantly lower global warming potential (GWP) compared to the earlier generation of propellants.

Moreover, the contained nature of aerosol cans means that the propellants are safely stored until the moment of use, reducing the risk of unintended releases into the environment. The precise engineering behind these cans ensures that the product is dispensed with minimal environmental impact, making aerosols a responsible choice in product packaging.

4. Reducing Product Loss and Spills

Unlike liquid products that come in bottles or jars, aerosol cans are sealed and pressurised, which prevents contamination and spoilage. This containment ensures that the product inside remains uncontaminated and effective throughout its shelf life. Additionally, aerosol packaging reduces the likelihood of spills, leaks, or accidental overuse, further enhancing the environmental efficiency of the product.

Conclusion: Aerosols as a Sustainable Choice

Aerosol spray cans are often misunderstood, but when considering their efficiency, recyclability, safety, and waste-reduction capabilities, it becomes clear that they are an environmentally responsible option. The Aerosol Association of New Zealand remains committed to promoting sustainable practices within the industry and educating consumers on the environmental benefits of aerosol products.

In a world increasingly focused on sustainability, it is important to recognise and embrace the innovations that make products like aerosol cans not only convenient but also kind to our planet.

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President

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