

## **Product Stewardship Policy Opens Doors and Discussions in Support of Sustainability**

*By Jon Kalin, RPA Chairman of the Board; Sales and Marketing Manager for Rehrig Pacific*

On January 27, 2010 the Reusable Packaging Association's (RPA) Board of Directors adopted an official policy supporting Product Stewardship and Extended Producer Responsibility. The RPA is embracing this important issue because our goal is to promote the value and expansion of reusable materials as preferred packaging solutions across supply chains, private or public. Our mission couldn't be clearer and this recent policy adopted by our Board of Directors is consistent with our organization's mission and goals.

Product stewardship, as defined by the U.S. EPA, is a product-centered approach to environmental protection. Also known as extended producer responsibility (EPR), "product stewardship calls on those in the product life cycle - manufacturers, retailers, users, and disposers - to share responsibility for reducing the environmental impacts of products."

(<http://www.epa.gov/epawaste/partnerships/stewardship/basic.htm>) The primary role and responsibility is placed with the producer to make development and marketing decisions focusing on efforts to reduce the environmental footprint of their product.

In support of the EPA's efforts, the Product Stewardship Institute and many state and local jurisdictions have worked together to establish the following five Framework Principles for Product Stewardship:

- (1) producer responsibility;
- (2) shared responsibilities with retail, government and consumer participants;
- (3) governance of activities;
- (4) financing of programs, and
- (5) environmental considerations.

We support these principles because it is the first step in establishing a common public policy or framework to discuss and debate the best ways to handle the resources used for moving products in commerce. We think this shared common goal can benefit manufacturers of packaging products, the consumers who benefit from the packaged products and government entities that must manage the waste that is generated.

Understanding how best to use and manage our natural resources and limit eliminate waste while still delivering the products and services that make us one of the most productive societies in the world is indeed a challenge. As an industry,(we are speaking as an industry in this instance) we need to be fully engaged in this important discussion. We know that designing and creating reusable products from whatever materials are deemed most appropriate for a particular application, and managing these products throughout their life cycle is both good business and consistent with good product stewardship. As an industry, we stake our economic viability on the belief that products should have multiple uses, should be recoverable, and when their usefulness comes to an end, they should be recycled to create a new product. So at the very heart

of our industry we believe reusable packaging is consistent with the Framework Principles for Product Stewardship.

Having entered this debate we do, however; have one caveat. As federal, state and local governments move to embrace these principles in laws and regulation, we think it is both practical and prudent to review each approach on a case-by-case basis. The ultimate goal here is not to raise revenue nor punish the manufacturers of the packaging that is so critical to our economic sustainability. Rather, it is to create a sustainable strategy that does not hamper the efficient flow of products and services in commerce; to create a common policy that rewards innovative approaches and discourages ones that waste resources and damage the environment. Pitting one side against the other in this debate is not in the best interest of our economy nor of our children's future. Seeking working solutions to the very real problems of waste and environmental degradation are at the very root of this debate.

The RPA believes strongly that reusable packaging is a part of the solution and should be part of any company's sustainable packaging strategy. It's not the only solution, but it does deserve a closer look in the discussion of how to move forward. It is for these reasons that we see this debate as an opportunity to engage a wider audience about the role of reusable solutions. The Reusable Packaging Association is ready to be a vital part of this important discussion. We don't think it makes good business sense to stand on the sidelines and let others influence our future without being part of the discussion. We hope our proactive approach spurs open and mutually beneficial debate. More importantly, we hope this discussion spurs further innovations and solutions that are critical to creating a sustainable economic future.

[end]