

NAPCOR Position on the Use of Amber in PET Beer Bottles

Sustainability issues have prompted the beer industry to look with renewed interest at PET containers, encouraging NAPCOR to revisit the question of what impact amber bottles have on the recycling stream.

Currently, amber is considered a non-traditional color (colors other than clear, light blue and transparent green) by PET bottle reclaimers. Most of the non-traditional color bottles that are collected are, in turn, recycled, however recycling them carries an economic burden to the system, namely that the value of the clean flake produced does not cover the acquisition and processing costs.

There's been speculation that if a critical mass of amber bottles were introduced into the marketplace, i.e., in quantities sufficient to justify separate processing, the resulting amber flake might reach a value similar to that of green, particularly if some of the recycle could be incorporated back into the amber bottles themselves. For beer applications, growth of this sort would mean increased market share for PET which would come largely at the expense of aluminum and glass.

It's important to emphasize, however, that the performance-enhancing technologies that are often used to achieve desired shelf-life for beer in PET may adversely impact the quality of the traditional (clear or green) PET recycling streams, especially if they're present in significantly increased volumes. It thus makes good sense to encourage that these new beer applications be in amber PET, rather than in clear, so that they're easy to identify, separate, and reclaim for next-use markets.

To this end, NAPCOR applauds the expanded use of amber PET beer bottles and mini-kegs; urges brand owners to adhere to design for recycling guidelines; and encourages brand owners to explore end-use market applications for the amber recycle – applications that provide enough value to cover the cost of recycling.