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DEGRADABLE ADDITIVES PROVIDE POOR END-OF-LIFE OPTION FOR PET PACKAGING, SAYS NAPCOR

PET Trade Organization Opposes Their Use, Citing Continued Lack of Data

May 3, 2011, Sonoma, CA -- The National Association for PET Container Resources (NAPCOR) today reiterated its position on degradable additives, confirming its opposition to their use in all PET packaging. The PET trade organization had previously urged caution in the use of these additives (May 2009), citing lack of data about potential effects on PET recycling. NAPCOR's decision to reaffirm its public stance on this issue was prompted by continued new package introductions and related claims, without adequate new data demonstrating additives' efficacy as an end-of-life strategy, or their effects on recycling.

“There is still insufficient evidence that these additives do ‘no harm’ to the PET recycling stream under real-life conditions, nor is there data to confirm that the lifespan and functionality of the many next-use products made from recycled PET won't be adversely affected,” said Tom Busard, NAPCOR's Chairman. “This is of serious concern to the PET packaging and recycling industries.”

Degradable additives are commonly added during the production of plastic packaging in order to promote degradation of that packaging under certain circumstances. These additives are impossible to detect visually, or through any commonly used recycled material sorting technologies. NAPCOR maintains that the use of degradable additives in PET packaging not only jeopardizes PET recycling due to unknown potential consequences, but runs counter to the principles of sustainability and sound environmental stewardship, making it a poor end-of-life option:

- Increases GHGs emitted in landfills and elsewhere;
- Squanders value of the energy inherent in a plastic package that would be captured through recycling and re-converting to a new end-use application;
- Provides no nutrient value to the environment in which it decomposes;
- Endangers post consumer plastic recycling for those resins in which the additive is used;
- Solves no solid waste management problems, including litter.
(A study recently released by NSF International indicates a biodegradation total of less than 5% after 60 days for the additive-containing bottle(s) tested. For link to full report:
<http://www.bpiworld.org/BPI-Public/News/Article.html?mode=PostView&bmi=513259>)

Concern about the integrity and safety of products made from recycled materials containing degradable additives, and the lack of data on their potential effects on the PET recycling stream, prompted the plastics recycling trade organization, The Association of Postconsumer Plastic Recyclers (APR), to develop and publish test protocols in early 2010, “Degradable Additives and PET Recycling Technical Compatibility Testing Guidance.” (Find these protocols at <http://www.plasticsrecycling.org/technical-resources/testing/degradable-additives-testing-for-pet>)

“Although some data have come in, they are not sufficient to remove doubt about the potential effects of these additives,” said APR Technical Director David Cornell. “Since the protocols were made public about a year ago, only a very small percentage of the manufacturers that market these products have made public any data on recycling effects. We are far from assured these products do no harm. On the contrary, we have serious and legitimate concerns that continue unanswered.”

In 2009, over 1.4 billion pounds of post consumer PET containers were recycled in the United States. The post consumer PET recycling infrastructure depends on the quality of the recyclate and its suitability for a variety of next-life product applications. The value of recycled materials is an important economic driver for curbside recycling programs throughout the country; successful recycling creates jobs, as well as an energy and resource-efficient source of raw material. Additives with unknown consequences put this entire system at risk – and for no practical, data-supported environmental or solid waste management gain.

NAPCOR calls upon product stewards and packaging decision makers to refrain from using degradable additives, except where specified by law, and reiterates its call for all stakeholders to fully consider the impacts behind the use of these additives, both in the context of meaningful marketing claims, and in light of the broader issues of sustainability, climate change, and resource conservation.

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Founded in 1987, NAPCOR is the trade association for the PET plastic packaging industry in the United States and Canada. NAPCOR is committed to being the credible voice and champion of the PET industry; to facilitating solutions to PET recycling; and to communicating the attributes of PET, an environmentally sustainable package. For more about NAPCOR, or to contact NAPCOR staff, visit www.napcor.com.