Metal and Plastic Products

Sustainability Snapshot

THESIS
BY THE SUSTAINABILITY CONSORTIUM

Product Description

Metal and Plastic Products include consumer products made predominantly of metal and plastic. Product types include sporting goods and food storage containers.

Mission

The mission of The Sustainability Consortium (TSC) is to improve the sustainability of products when they are made, purchased, and used, with a focus on manufacturers and the retail buyers who decide what products to carry in stores. The information in this document is drawn from our detailed research on known and potential social and environmental impacts across product life cycles. TSC acknowledges that other issues exist, but we have included here those that are most relevant to the decision making of retail buying teams and manufacturers. The topics are listed alphabetically for ease of reading; the order does not represent prioritization or other criteria.

Consumers

Consumer Health and Safety

Products with plastic can contain chemicals that, depending on use and exposure, may be harmful to humans if consumed. Product manufacturers should determine whether such chemicals are in their products and strive to reduce, eliminate, or restrict their use. Manufacturers should work with their supply chains to exclude hazardous materials from their products, understand what risks may be present in their raw materials, and assess alternatives.

Managing the Supply Chain

Pollution

Plastic pellets used to make products can fall off transport carriers or spill during transfers along the supply chain, posing a threat to waterways and to land animals that consume them. Manufacturers should establish practices to prevent the loss of plastic pellets and engage in stewardship and clean-up programs to mitigate the problem.

Sustainable Mining

Mining operations can pollute the air and water, diminish natural resources, and jeopardize community and worker rights, health, and safety. Manufacturers should source their raw materials from suppliers that benchmark the environmental and social sustainability practices of their mining operations against recognized standards.

Use of Resources

Climate and Energy

Processing and final product manufacturing of metal and plastic products consume significant amounts of electricity and energy, leading to greenhouse gas emissions. Manufacturers should procure from suppliers

that help abate these impacts by measuring, tracking, and reporting energy use and greenhouse gas emissions, with a focus on reduction. They should also perform preventative maintenance on equipment, replace inefficient equipment, use renewable energy sources, and encourage efficient energy behaviors throughout their operations.

Material Efficiency

Production of plastics and metals depletes both energy and material resources, and improper disposal can represent a loss of otherwise reusable material and the potential release of pollutants. Manufacturers should minimize these impacts by designing products that optimize durability while using the least possible amount of material overall, as well as more material that is recyclable and comes from recycled sources.

Workers and Communities

Conflict Minerals

Metal and plastic products may contain minerals, including gold and ores of tantalum, tin, and tungsten, that are mined in places where groups responsible for human rights abuses control and profit from mining operations. Manufacturers should ensure that materials in their products are sourced responsibly and are not from these areas, and should try to help improve stability and quality of life for miners and their communities.

Workers

Workers may be exposed to chemicals, dust, noise, or other industrial hazards. To help ensure worker health and safety, manufacturers should have a documented health and safety management plan, including a chemical management plan where needed, and provide safety training and personal protective equipment to workers. Manufacturers should procure materials from suppliers that address worker health and safety transparently and should perform audits when needed.