



COVID-19 - The packaging supply chain for food and pharmaceutical products is essential to maintain security of supply

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The undersigned associations are the core value chain for the production of packaging and thus essential for securing and transporting the vital food and pharmaceutical products across Europe amid the current COVID-19 crisis. Securing the supply of food and pharmaceutical products to the population is system-relevant and packaging is an integral part of it.

We welcome actions already taken by governments and the European Commission to help businesses at this challenging time and to curtail the spread of COVID-19. Each of our industries are taking steps to support this effort. However, the heightened need for food and medicine across Europe means that action must also be taken to safeguard supply chains and ensure the continuation of production. Our concerns primarily lie in potential delays at borders and the supply of essential materials for packaging, as well as raw materials for food packaging intermediates, like inks and adhesives.

The undersigned associations call on the Commission and National Governments to:

1) Protect and guarantee the security of the supply and the transport of packaging for food and pharmaceutical products including their supply chain, and the required raw materials and intermediate products.

Transport packaging (used to transport packaged goods) and sales packaging (containing the product) make these goods available to the end consumer and ensure maximum shelf life. The raw materials and intermediate products used to manufacture packaging are essentially: paper and board, metals or plastics as substrates; adhesives to hold various parts of packaging together and give adequate barrier (if relevant) to the packaged food; printing inks and varnishes, which must be used to print the packaging in order to provide information about the contents of the packaging and the use of the product.

2) Open borders for packaging supply chains

The recently introduced national border controls within the Schengen area threaten the supply chains in the EU for food and pharmaceutical products. Moreover, employees of logistics companies are scared and refuse to drive into areas with high restrictions; they fear being placed under precautionary quarantine in these regions and not be allowed to return.

The supply chains of packaging and their raw materials and precursors for food and pharmaceutical products must be protected and exempted from the restrictions on the cross-border movement of goods. At national borders, appropriate measures and processes for the priority handling of such products should be implemented (priority "green lanes").

The undersigned associations appeal for assurances to the transport sector that drivers will be allowed to return to their starting point under all circumstances.

3) Address shortages and price increases of raw materials

The undersigned associations urge for packaging and the components required to manufacture them for food and pharmaceutical products to be classified as integral components and system-relevant products of strategic relevance in connection with measures to contain the COVID-19 pandemic.

COVID-19 has led to a dramatic shortage of synthetic ethanol which is used for inks to print packaging as well as to clean printing machines; the same holds true for isopropanol (IPA). This is a result of the increasing production of medical disinfectants which can also be made using these solvents. The increased production of disinfectant has also led to price increases for synthetic ethanol and IPA, which could lead to higher prices for consumers. Printers have a specific need for synthetic ethanol and IPA. To increase the needed supply for disinfectants, alternative sources of solvents could be considered to meet the present medical applications needs.

Without these solvents, the manufacture of solvent-based packaging inks and the printing process are severely disrupted to the effect that packaging for food and pharmaceutical products are at risk of not being produced any more. Shortages are becoming evident also in other raw materials for food packaging intermediates, like adhesives.

Political decision-makers must safeguard the supply of synthetic ethanol and IPA to ensure its availability also for the manufacture of printing inks and for the printing process for food and pharmaceutical packaging, as well as to ensure availability for the raw materials for adhesives.

Signatory associations:

CEPI - Confederation of European Paper Industries

CITPA - International Confederation of Paper and Board Converters

ECMA - European Carton Makers Association

EuPC - European Plastics Converters Confederation

EuPIA- a sector of CEPE: European Printing Ink Association

FEFCO - European Federation of Corrugated Board Manufacturers

FEICA - Association of the European Adhesive & Sealant Industry

FPE - Flexible Packaging Europe

Intergraf - European Federation for Print and Digital Communication

I&P Europe - Imaging and Printing Association