

# Opening Gambit?

*Tamper-evident elements can help protect your brand*

**P**ackaging isn't just something you throw your product into and then forget about. Long before 9/11, food and drug packaging showed itself to be an essential element in product security. In addition to protecting the product against physical and microbiological harm and oxygen ingress and providing brand recognition and product differentiation in the marketplace, packaging also protects the consumer against tampering, whether deliberate or accidental.

"Tamper-evident packaging really got its kick-start in 1982 when there was the scare around Tylenol laced with cyanide," says Terry Rees, sales representative for Celplast Packaging Systems. There are two main types of tampering, he says. "Malicious tampering with psychotic motives or with practical motives like personal or political gain and benign tampering, where a customer 'samples' a product and puts it back on the shelf and the next customer is unaware of the contamination." Benign tampering is equivalent to theft because it compromises the safety and quality of the product and may render it unsaleable.

If a product must be recalled due to tampering or some other problem, the cost can be staggering. "A thorough recall costs roughly 2.5 times more than the cost of selling the original product," says Rees. "And the cost doesn't stop there. The resulting bad publicity can lead to reduction in brand equity. The affected company might face de-listing by a retailer or even litigation if the contamination leads to serious illness, injury or death."

By comparison, the costs of adding tamper-evident elements to a packaging system need not be hugely expensive. "There are numerous forms of manually applied tamper-evident seals that can be added to an existing packaging system," explains Rees. "Without changing the packaging concept, you've added a barrier against tampering. Moreover, it is also possible to add a clear or printed shrink-sleeve or printed shrink label to the entire package, keeping the

contents secure and reassuring the consumer that the product has not been adulterated."

Most tampering happens in the retail environment, which is why the store clerk stocking the shelves is one of the most important links in the tamper-evident chain. True tamper-evident packaging must make it clear to the clerk at a glance that the product has been interfered with. "This is why under-lid barriers, heat-sealed pop-up lids, glued boxes and non-distinctive tape seals aren't true tamper-evident packaging," explains Rees. "They're either not sufficiently and distinctively visible to catch the clerk's attention or they can be faked by a truly malicious tamperer with a glue gun and a hair dryer."



Tamper-evident packaging can be in the form of a new package or an addition to an existing system.

This makes disposal of unused tamper-evident packaging a crucial security issue, warns Kathryn Cooper, the Guelph Food Technology Centre's vice-president of market development and client services. "If someone can just gather a lot of unused neck seals or tray labels from the dumpster outside your plant, then he or she can just buy or steal some of your product, remove the seal, contaminate the product, reseal it with an authentic-looking seal or label and replace it on the shelves. The customer would never know the difference." In the case of a genuine seal there should be a notice elsewhere on the package that alerts consumers to the seal, so they'll know if it has been removed.

Well, you might ask, why not go the extra step and make packaging tamper-proof and not just tamper-evident? "Short of encasing a product in concrete, it's almost impossible to render something completely tamper-proof," says Rees. "The best way to deal with issues of tampering is to ensure that any tampering that does occur is clearly visible to the potential consumer and to alert consumers to be on the watch for evidence of tampering in the products they buy."

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