

FAQ paper-like plastic packaging (09/01/2025)

Note: sorting and recycling technologies are constantly evolving, therefore, the design for recycling guidelines evolve too. Please make sure you have the latest version of this file, by verifying the date of the last update on Fost Plus' website.

What is a paper-like plastic packaging?

It is a plastic packaging that has an outside lacquer providing the appearance, and sometimes the feel, of paper. Some lacquer give a very realistic paper-feel, giving the illusion of a paper-based packaging.

Is a paper-like plastic recyclable?

In order to be recycled, a packaging must be collected, sorted and then recycled.

While the paper-like lacquer might in some cases not hinder the sorting and recycling steps, it is a problem for the collection.

A plastic packaging should be sorted by the consumer in the PMD bag, and a paper-based packaging should be sorted in the paper/cardboard collection stream. If the paper-like lacquer of the plastic packaging gives a very realistic impression of paper, the consumer may dispose of the plastic packaging with the paper/cardboard, in spite of the potential on-pack sorting instructions.

This will not only prevent the plastic from being recycled, but also disturb the paper recycling process.

Furthermore, when paper-like lacquer is used on polyolefin, flexible or rigid, it may increase the density of the final packaging, which is a problem since the density of polyolefin must remain $<0,99$ for recycling.

Therefore, Fost Plus does not recommend paper-like plastic packaging.

What are the alternatives?

To give a plastic packaging a similar look, without causing confusion for the consumer, a pattern with a color similar to the one of paper can be printed on the packaging, or a paper-like lacquer can be applied on a restricted area of the plastic packaging, as long as the packaging is easily identifiable as plastic by the consumer.

Sorting instructions can also be added to the packaging. Fost Plus proposes a [style guide](#), that can be used on a voluntary basis.