UK consumers are the worst for clogging up recycling bins by 'wishcycling'

- Three-quarters of UK adults have thrown something in a recycling bin that they weren't sure was recyclable
- Soft drinks are seen as the best category for recyclable packaging; takeaways are the worst
- Nine out of ten UK consumers think businesses should be doing more to instruct people on how to properly recycle packaging.

UK consumers are the worst offenders globally when it comes to 'wishcycling' - disposing of a piece of packaging in a recycling bin when they weren't 100% sure it was recyclable.

According to research unveiled today, three-quarters (73%) of UK adults admit to having done this at least once, compared to 61% in the US, 69% in Canada, 68% in France and Germany, 66% in Spain and only 51% in Italy.

The survey of 2,000 people across the UK, US, Canada and continental Europe was carried out by packaging sustainability consultancy **Aura**.

The study also highlighted the continuing confusion over what is recyclable and what isn't, thanks to packaging that is ambiguous and lacks disposal/end-of-life labelling on the pack. More than eight out of ten consumers (83% globally, again rising to 88% in the UK) think businesses should be doing more to instruct people on how to properly recycle packaging.

Gillian Garside-Wight, Aura's director of consulting, said: "People might hope for the best when they dispose of packaging in the recycling bin, but all too often they end up contaminating the recycling stream and reducing the quality and value of the post-consumer recyclate (PRC).

"The onus is on everyone, including brands and retailers, to educate consumers. This should be through consistent and recognisable end-of-life labelling schemes, such as OPRL in the UK. This not only educates consumers but ensures a consistent message, removing ambiguity and instructing on the correct disposal method in each market.

UK consumers were also asked which product categories do a good job of showing whether their packaging is recyclable or not. The top five were:

1. Soft drinks (chosen by 52% of shoppers)
2. Toiletries (40%)
3. Household products (37%)
4. E-commerce (e.g. Amazon boxes) (30%)
5. Fresh food (29%)

They were also asked which categories use the most excessive or unsustainable packaging – and the five worst culprits were:

1. Takeaway food (chosen by 19%)
2. Beauty/cosmetics (16%)
3. E-commerce providers (15.5%)
4. Toys & games (15%)
5. White goods (14%)

Gillian Garside-Wight added: “Soft drinks brands include some of the world leaders in sustainability and recycling, so it’s no surprise to see them lauded for their labelling that shows which of their products are recyclable.

“However, there are clearly businesses that could and should be doing far more to reduce and improve the packaging they use, and in some cases communicate it. There have been vast improvements in the packaging used by many e-commerce and toy brands in recent years, but consumers simply aren’t always seeing or hearing about it.

“If companies have access to the right data on their packaging, including all the substrates, laminates, coatings, additives, adhesives and attached components, they can manage and communicate it far more effectively.

“There are always things they can do to improve. Food contamination from takeaways will prevent many people from recycling, so use less packaging. In addition, bathroom products like health and beauty are notorious for seeing far lower recycling rates than kitchen products, so educate consumers to do more.”

ENDS

Notes to Editors:

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About Aura:

Aura is a packaging sustainability consultancy, committed to making a measurable difference – every day. We combine consultancy, strategy, and technology to deliver best-in- class, sustainable packaging solutions.

Our team of packaging, sustainability, technology, and retail experts are pioneers in the use of data and knowledge that gives clients actionable reference points to drive positive change.

Our technology solution, **e-halo**, powers our solutions with clear and transparent structural packaging and sustainability data, so we can help clients optimize packaging, manage compliance and tax liabilities - and reduce environmental impact.

We are a multi-disciplined team of passionate specialists united in our belief that truly sustainable packaging can power positive environmental change.

Aura's clients include the world's biggest e-tailer and the world's biggest retailer.