Detergent products become increasingly concentrated

Sector aims for sustainable and cost-effective washing

The amount of detergent required for a machine wash has almost halved in less than ten years. This evolution, driven by detergent producers, has enabled a considerable reduction in the volume of detergent packaging. This is not only beneficial to the environment; it also generates savings for consumers. Consumers’ behaviour, however, remains a key factor in making washing even more sustainable.

Less and less washing powder

Over the past ten years, the active ingredients of detergent products have become increasingly concentrated. The dose for a single wash reduced from 150 grams in 1998 to 85 grams in 2009. This trend has become increasingly widespread: all powder detergents marketed today are much more concentrated.

Products labelled ‘super-concentrated’ in 2000 are now standard. Liquid detergent products are currently following a similar trend. This evolution means savings in both packaging and transport, but it also means a reduction in the environmental impact (see also article ‘Role’, as well as the various testimonials).

10,000 fewer road transports and 5,000 fewer tons of packaging in 2009

On 1 January 2009, the industry launched the Laundry Sustainability Programme 2 (LSP 2). The aim of the programme is to optimize the concentration of washing powders and, consequently, to reduce their environmental impact even further. Participating companies commit to lowering the volume and weight of washing powders by 10 to 15% without any loss of performance. In 2009, the target of LSP 2 was to save 200,000 tons of powder, 5,000 tons of packaging and 10,000 road transports.

In mid 2009, the sector adopted a similar programme for the improved concentration of liquid detergents. This programme includes developing a basic product that enables a single wash with just a 75 ml dose.

The concentration of detergent products has meant the washing dose has diminished by almost 50% in less than ten years. This has reduced packaging, transportation and raw materials to a similar extent.

For the sustainable washing of clothes, the consumer must follow the washing instructions on the packaging carefully.

The evolution in concentration has been encouraged by the sector in the form of a number of initiatives. The most recent one is the Laundry Sustainability Programme 2 (LSP 2), which targets savings of 5,000 tons of packaging.
Feature

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Avoid overdosing... and underdosing

Efforts made by producers in favour of the environment are proving successful. The impact of these efforts, however, depends greatly on consumer behaviour. Three factors determine the outcome: the quantity of detergent product used, the temperature of the washing and the filling of the drum.

A study carried out by InSites Consulting in 2008 reveals that consumers are generally aware of the recommended dose. In fact, in Western Europe, consumers tend to undos. However, household linen that is not washed well often needs to be rewashed, which leads to a greater impact on the environment. What’s more, one in two washes is done with a drum that is not filled correctly, and one in five is programmed at a temperature of 60°C or more.

Packaging conveys information to optimize consumption

Correctly informing the consumer is essential if consumption is to be optimized. Packaging plays a key role in this. Information goes beyond providing the legal references on the product’s composition. Through labels, a packaging also guides the consumer in using the product correctly. This information is particularly important when, following the concentration of a product, the number of doses increases without a reduction in packaging size. In this situation, there is a greater risk of the consumer using too much detergent. That is why, in the context of the LSP 2 programme, the sector is planning to instruct the consumer on the use of concentrated products with a number of visuals on the packaging. This initiative is expected to result in considerable water savings. If all European consumers were to fill their drums correctly, 700 million litres of water could be saved each day.

In addition, it is important to inform consumers correctly about price. Collaboration with other players in the supply chain, particularly with distributors, is therefore essential. That is why certain distributors have started indicating the price per dose on the packaging (see Colruyt testimonial).

An essential code of good practice

In 1996, the European detergent industry (AISE) initiated a campaign aimed at reducing the environmental footprint of detergent products. The code of good practice that was drawn up in this context was adopted by 90% of companies in the sector. It included a number of target figures such as 10% fewer detergent products used per person, a reduced usage of slightly biodegradable ingredients, and a 10% drop in the quantity of packaging used.

These targets were achieved in 2004 and led to the creation of the Charter for Sustainable Cleaning. This charter prescribes a set of sustainability procedures to be implemented at corporate management level. Thanks to this charter, the sector has reduced its CO₂ emissions from 80,9 to 66,9 kg per manufactured ton, which represents a drop of over 9%.

For additional information
• DETIC – Belgian and Luxembourg association of manufacturers and distributors of soaps, cosmetics, detergents, maintenance products, hygiene and toilet products, glues products and associated materials: www.detiqué
• AISE Laundry Detergent Study, InSites Consulting, December 2008: www.insites.eu