

## **The Reality of the Recycling Debate in the Billboard Industry**

### **“You Have A Choice”**

There is a groundswell of misinformation that PVC (i.e., polyvinyl chloride) billboard products are not recyclable. We all understand that there is no longer a debate as to whether there is a need to better manage our earth's resources it is a necessity. Creating “cradle to cradle” products developed for primary uses, which are engineered to be processable into different applications after their first life, avoids millions of pounds of materials going into our landfills. What's more is that the earth's limited resources are preserved for future generations.

So, the question still remains whether PVC Billboards can or cannot be recycled. The answer is a resounding YES they can be. In fact, there have been recycling processes in place since the year 2000 for billboard materials. The key practice limiting more PVC billboard from being recycled has been the lucrative aftermarket for used billboards (i.e., used as tarps and agriculture covers). The result is that PVC billboards are being re-used – their technical nutrient lifecycles extended. This is an admirable practice, but may no longer be the world-class standard for managing technical nutrient lifecycles. A closed-loop billboard recycling practice is more apropos these days given the advancements in technologies and collection-point logistics.

Outdoor advertisers should not have to choose between PVC, PE, PP as their only option for their green solutions. That is why we have painstakingly engineered all of our billboard products to be recyclable and have developed the necessary partners to manage the recycling supply chain. We have left it to our customers to choose which billboard technology (i.e. PVC, or PP, or PE, or all three) best suits their needs, affording them maximum flexibility and ultimately providing them with environmentally responsible solutions.

Back to the question of, "Can PVC be recycled?" Principia Partners in Exton, Pennsylvania investigated both post-consumer and post-industrial PVC recycling. The study included interviews with more than 120 recycling executives, as well as reviews of existing databases, trade and business publications and government reports. Principia notes, of the 721 million pounds of PVC “post industrial” scrap not directly used in the processor's plant, nearly 75%, or 541 million pounds, was used in other applications. These applications included garden hose, window and door seals, electrical boxes, mobile home skirts, automotive sound deadening material, floor mats, pool and pond liners and weather-stripping, to name just a few.

As an example of a recycling initiative you need only to look at the carpet industries' CARE Program (i.e., Carpet America Recovery Effort). This is a joint industry-government effort to increase the amount of recycling and reuse of post-consumer carpet and reduce the amount of waste carpet going to landfills. CARE was established as a result of a “Memorandum of Understanding for Carpet Stewardship,” a national agreement signed by members of the carpet industry, representatives of government agencies and non-government organizations. In 2006 alone, CARE reported that 240,000,000 pounds of post consumer carpet was recycled. Since its inception in the year 2002, there has been more than 663,000,000 pounds of post-consumer carpet recycled. Please note that a major portion of this is PVC backed industrial carpet tile.

The Cooley Group, as a member of OAAA, along with the support of our many long-term customers, is dedicated to providing the “right products for the right applications.” In addition to our standard 12-ounce products that have been used for years, we have developed an array of lighter weight (i.e., 5, 6, 7 and 8 ounce) PVC and PE products that cut the weight of a standard billboard from 75 pounds to 30 pounds. We are very sensitive to the environment and promote the fact that all our billboard products can currently be recycled. Billboard materials are only one part of the effort to go “green” in outdoor advertising. It is going to take the efforts of the lighting manufacturers as well to reduce the total energy consumption of this business. It is time for someone to speak up and let the advertisers, printers and outdoor companies know, when choosing your billboard print materials, remember -

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