

By Thais Santi

# *Paper in the forefront of Brazil's Solid Waste Policy*



BY BRACELPA

**T**he law instituting the National Solid Waste Policy (PNRS) was approved a year ago. Only now, however, are we seeing the first signs of company activities regarding waste disposal forms and responsibility to gain importance in the media, in society and, especially, in industrial sectors.

A total of five business groups will have their rules stipulated by the federal government on what to do from now on in terms of complying with the new law – which rules were defined by Thematic Work Groups (GTTs), one being the Packaging GTT. As paper is one of the raw materials of this product, the sector is represented in this GTT by the Brazilian Pulp and Paper Association (Bracelpa), which is receiving support from other entities of the sector with the objective of defining operational rules for adapting paper company activities to the new law.

How will packaging be disposed? How to identify and separate materials? Which types of packaging can or can't be recycled? These and other answers you will see as follows in the interview with Bracelpa's Executive President, Elizabeth de Carvalhaes.

***What are the sector's main challenges with the effective implementation of the new National Solid Waste Policy (PNRS)?***

**Elizabeth de Carvalhaes** – To ensure involvement and alignment of the entire production and consumption chain of paper packaging – producers, converters, printers, distributors and associations, among other players – in accordance with the PNRS. This will be the sector's main challenge. Another important goal consists in preparing a waste management plan that systematizes good practices already consolidated.

We will also seek to inform society that Brazil is a major recycler of paper. The latest study (2009) shows that the volume of wastepaper recovered amounted to 3.9 million tons, which is 46% of the apparent consumption of paper in the period.

Private sector initiatives, as well as governmental campaigns and increased awareness on the part of civil society, have contributed to improve this index over the years. When we specifically analyze the universe of wastepaper for packaging, which is the focus of PNRS at the moment, the result is even more impressive: in 2009 were recycled 2.9 million tons of this type of paper, or 71% of the country's consumption of packaging paper, which totaled 4.1 million tons in the period. The sector is fully capable of increasing this percentage even more and, by creating municipal systems for separating waste, the PNRS shall contribute in this process.

***In practice, how will "shared responsibility" or reverse logistics work for companies?***

**Elizabeth** – As one of the PNRS pillars, reverse logistics stipulates that the manufacturer assume part of the responsibility for the environmentally appropriate disposal of waste generated. In order for this to be viable, it is essential that there also be engagement and mobilization on the part of those sectors that are at the end of the chain: distributors, retailers, wastepaper collectors, cooperatives, as well as all consumers. This is what we call "shared responsibility".

This process may result in the development of packagings that prioritize even more recyclable materials, processes, formats and finishings. This is one of the issues being discussed with representatives from the National Industry Confederation (CNI) and Brazilian Packaging Association (ABRE) in the Packaging GTT, created by the Environment Ministry with the objective of presenting and evaluating new models.

***What could you highlight as positive and negative about the new PNRS for the paper industry?***

**Elizabeth** – The expectations of those formulating the Policy is to reduce the solid waste generated by all sorts of materials, including paper. However, it is necessary to take into consideration that the PNRS will also redesign the way sectors that produce packaging operate, in the pursuit of materials with greater recyclability.

In this aspect, paper is already in the forefront as an environmentally friendly option in view of its excellent technical recycling conditions, as well as other attributes, such as sustainable production, design

options, print quality and sophistication, which enhance paper and paperboard-packaged products. With this, we believe that the PNRS can, in fact, influence an increase in demand for paper in packaging. Companies looking to establish their image as being environmentally responsible will certainly follow this path.

***Bracelpa represents the pulp and paper sector in the Packaging GTT, which will be responsible for defining and applying the reverse logistics of these materials, as foreseen in PNRS regulations. What has been the entity's positioning in this GTT?***

**Elizabeth** – Bracelpa's role in this forum is help create a sectorial plan for the reverse logistics of paper and paperboard packaging, establishing voluntary commitments and a specific goal for increasing recycling levels. Bracelpa works in alignment with the industrial sector, playing an active role especially in decisions relating to reverse logistics.

We have, for example, been reinforcing that the industrial sector will adopt efficient and viable management models from a technical, environmental and economic point of view, always respecting the specificity of each sector. Additionally, we've emphasized that producers will not assume responsibility for collecting, handling and transportation of solid waste, which are waste separation activities, keeping in mind that this is a municipal government responsibility.

***Is it possible to say that the paper sector is already ready to comply with the new PNRS?***

**Elizabeth** – Certainly. The sector already has good practices, an excellent network nationwide for collecting wastepaper and conditions for expanding it even further. Considering Brazil's continental dimensions, it is important that collection occur at a municipal level, in order for it to be economic and environmentally viable.

***In addition to changes in terms of organization and destination of packaging in a product's life cycle for the production chain, does the new PNRS expect greater positive movement in the wastepaper sector, in view that the proposal foresees incentives for the recycling industry?***

**Elizabeth** – The PNRS foresees greater integration of all production chains, in a joint effort to remove solid waste from the environment. The incentives proposed shall benefit the entire recycling chain, including companies that receive wastepaper to produce paper and paperboard. The Policy will also create opportunities for the sector to engage in research and studies that aim to identify other products and applications for recycled fiber, broadening its usage.

***The relationship between wastepaper dealers-packaging paper companies has always been uneasy, considering the interests of each side. How will the new PNRS influence this reality with the objective of improving their relationship?***

**Elizabeth** – Given the volumes involved in comparison to that

of other products, paper and paperboard recycling is the one that provides the best financial return to cooperatives of wastepaper collectors and businesses. This is a model recognized for generating mutual benefits: paper producers purchase wastepaper collected and separated, according to their business needs, while wastepaper collectors and cooperatives are guaranteed that their product will be sold. It is a model that can still be perfected.

PNRS can cooperate a lot, especially in terms of regularizing and professionalizing a segment that still has its fragilities. One of the positions assumed in relation to this issue, for example, is that the industrial sector only establish working agreements or contracts with waste collecting associations or cooperatives that fully comply with all legal requirements, including labor, health, safety and environmental regulations. There is no tension, but rather a supplier-client relationship that exists in any other business field.

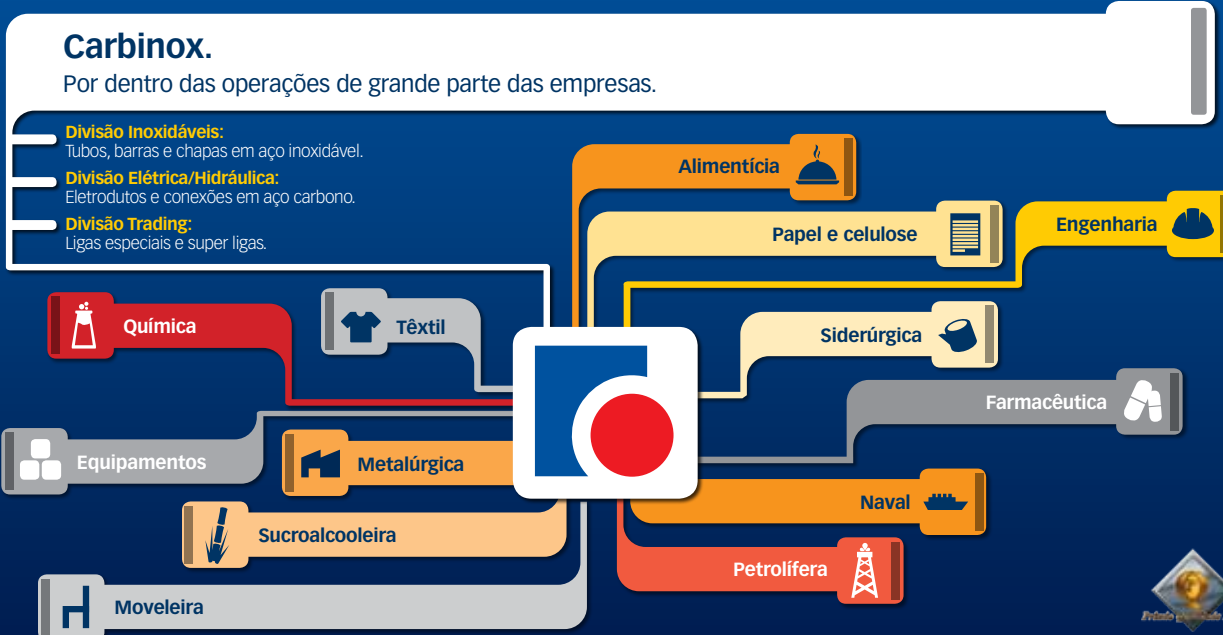
**What does the sector expect to receive in exchange from the government for perfecting the reverse logistics of paper packaging?**

**Elizabeth** – It already is a consensus in the industrial sector that in the reverse logistics mechanism the importer shall also be obliged to correctly dispose of product packaging coming from abroad.

Considering the characteristics of import procedures in Brazil, it is very important to establish clear and objective rules so that importers effectively fulfill their responsibility stipulated by law and so that this cost does not burden the domestic industry.

Additionally, we reinforced the government's responsibility in implementing waste separation systems. It is important to point out that the sectors are still analyzing if negotiations are a good and viable idea that will result in tax benefits. Should this occur, such negotiations shall benefit the entire recycling chain. ■

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