

2 easy and cost-effective ways your business can help save the environment

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When the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) shared its [report](#) in August 2021, an immediate call to action reverberated across the global population with many organisations renewing their commitments to sustainability. Yet, even the most eco-conscious manufacturers, warehouse operators, transporters and retailers are finding it difficult to achieve certain milestones.



Source: Supplied

Fulfilling consumer and commercial orders at record speeds doesn't always balance well with environmentally-friendly shipping practices. However, there are two things that every company can be doing to reduce their environmental impact while progress is made toward more ambitious goals.

Reduce plastic use and overall packaging

Half of all plastic produced today is [designed](#) to be used only once, including many protective packaging components. That's a problem considering almost 90% of it will end up in landfills or worse, the natural environment. Plastics and microplastics [often contain toxic components](#) that affect the health and wellness of both animals and humans. It's concerning to contemplate how much plastic tape and shrink wrap is currently being used to support consumer and commercial economic activity.

In 2019, [approximately 3,248 parcels were shipped](#) every second across the world's 13 major markets. The UK alone was responsible for the movement of [nearly four billion packages](#) that year, with Germany - Europe's top business-to-business sector - seeing just as many shipments in that time frame. And these stats aren't reflective of the pandemic-fueled e-commerce surges that most likely set new shipping records.

Though plastic has become a staple in the shipping of goods to help keep packaged or palletized items in place, it's not as necessary as one might believe. Zebra Technologies stopped using shrink wrap and plastic bags at just one manufacturing site in a pilot programme to determine if it would negatively impact the customer experience. It did not. On a positive note, more than 3,748lbs/1,700kg of single-use plastic was kept out of the environment.



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Other companies should find it just as feasible to eliminate plastic bags from the equation given how many eco-friendly - and multi-use - packaging materials are now available. In fact, many companies might find that plastic replacements can be eliminated with smarter packaging and pallet designs.

For example, box optimisation tools can help identify the best size box for each product so less filler packaging is needed and the volume of shipped products is reduced. In turn, fewer pallets - and plastic wrap - are needed. And as package and pallet size shrinks, more goods can be loaded into each trailer and container, reducing transportation-generated carbon emissions along with plastic-related emissions.

Change procurement practices - by all parties

The good news is shipments can be consolidated, reducing both packaging and carbon emissions, with limited trade-offs despite the perception that consolidated shipping methods automatically delay delivery dates. Though this could occur, the truth is not every item purchased is urgently needed. That message should be reinforced to customers and even within organisations' own sourcing strategies.

Many routine restocking orders are submitted weeks in advance of their actual need-by date either in preparation for an upcoming project that won't start for weeks (or months) or to take advantage of temporary price reductions. In "stock up" buying scenarios, it would benefit all parties – and the environment – to advocate for the selection of the most sustainable shipping option.



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In a perfect world, fewer trucks, trains, planes and boats would be dispatched to move goods, and that day could come

soon thanks to new technology innovations that are allowing companies to more strategically load trailers and containers to increase utilisation. In the meantime, a concerted effort should be made to adopt more environmentally friendly packaging and shipping methods.

Reconsidering the necessity of plastic in packaging and shipping orders is a good first step - and one that can lead to business, financial and environmental gains. Similarly, trying to put more goods in each package or pallet will help preserve precious resources.

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