

Single-use plastics and environment update

Background

The Urology Trade Association (UTA) was established in 2007 to represent manufacturers and suppliers of urology products. The association seeks to:

- promote and sustain patient choice in access to continence products;
- increase patient and public awareness about continence issues; and
- ensure that patients are not placed at adverse risk by ill-advised policy decisions.

Overview

This document is a response to discussions the Urology Trade Association have had with government departments and healthcare bodies about the steps our members are taking to reduce their carbon footprint and reduce single-use plastics waste in the production and supply of continence products.

Response

The UTA recognise the importance of tackling single-use plastics waste not only in their own manufacturing and waste streams, but also in the NHS, which is increasingly encouraged by Government to reduce the amount of unnecessary single-use plastics flowing through the healthcare system. Our members work closely with the NHS and procurement managers in the search for solutions.

Our members' intentions are to reduce the environmental impact of their activities, products and services by looking for opportunities to reduce and recycle. Actions taken by some of our members to reduce single-use plastics waste include:

Certifications and standards

Members have received certificates of compliance to the ISO 14001: 2015 environmental certification scheme. This certification specifies the requirements for an environmental management system that an organisation can use to enhance its environmental performance. The standard is intended for use by an organisation seeking to manage its environmental responsibilities in a systematic manner that contributes to the environmental pillar of sustainability.

Innovation

Some of our members have invested heavily in their R&D capabilities in recent years, with a view to improve patient choice, clinical outcomes, and protect the environment. Our members, for instance, have produced the world's first totally dissolvable female urinary catheter in a bid to reduce plastic pollution. The catheter dissolves completely in water after just 30 to 60 minutes, and so does not contribute to landfill waste or ocean pollution.

Suppliers

Our members recognise that they have a responsibility to work with suppliers who also look for ways to improve production and processes to reduce their environmental impact and footprint. Members have made requests to their suppliers to outline their strategy on how to reduce plastic packaging and improve recyclable options.

Transport

The environmental impact (CO₂ and greenhouse gas emissions) can be damaging when transporting raw materials. Members have taken measures to substitute air transportation with sea, railway and ground transportation – choosing transportation options that use less energy and emit fewer greenhouse gases. For

example, some members have set 'maximum' targets for air transportation and/or choosing transport providers who are reputable transport companies with documented environmental focus certified by ISO 14001.

Raw materials

One of our focus areas is the raw materials we use. Our members work to minimise the use of environmentally damaging products such as PVC and to reduce the amount of waste from our production. Increasingly, products are being designed to produce minimal environmental impact throughout the entire product lifecycle. This is through assessing the choice of material, manufacturing methods and handling of used products. Our members are increasingly using less water in the coating process for their catheters, embracing 100% renewable solvents in cases reducing the carbon footprint of the manufacturing process by 50%.

More members are considering the environmental footprint of their manufacturing processes and are producing life cycle assessments to aid their decision-making processes.

Reuse and recycling

For some members, all the electrical energy used within their manufacturing sites is from renewable sources and volatile organic compound emissions from production are collected in carbon filters with over 99% efficiency. Over 90% of the solvents used in production are recycled and, in some cases, used again. Clearly defined waste management strategies mean some members are recycling up to and over 45 per cent of their waste.

Members are increasingly looking to recycled materials for product packaging, too. Large parts of the product packaging and outer shell of the catheters are for, in many cases recyclable.

Going electronic

Urology product manufacturers can send the NHS millions of pieces of paper each year, in the form of prescriptions requests for products. Members are now requesting prescriptions electronically (e-Requesting) either via secure NHS email or via EMIS Medicines Manager. This will be better for the environment, reduce cost to the NHS, and cost to our members whilst significantly reducing order to delivery time.

Corporate social responsibility

Recognising the greater responsibilities and roles of manufacturers in protecting the environment, our members have also looked to implement corporate social responsibility mechanisms in place such as planting two trees for every one tree used.

Further information:

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