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100 years of alufoil and still moving forward



There is no better way to celebrate the future than to draw lessons from history, which is why the European Aluminium Foil Association is celebrating the 100th anniversary of aluminium foil with a look at past, current and some future technical developments.

Conceived as a replacement for tin foil, Robert Victor Neher took out a patent in 1910 for the continuous rolling process and opened the first aluminium rolling plant in Kreuzlingen, Switzerland, and by 1911 Bern-based Tobler began wrapping its chocolate bars in alufoil including the unique triangular chocolate bar, Toblerone. And by 1912 alufoil was being used by Maggi to pack soups and stock cubes.

EAFAs President François Coëffic said, “Looking into the future by appraising the past we can see that we have much to live up to. However, we believe that we are successfully carrying the banner for the alufoil industry. Already in the new millennium we are furthering our aims by creating ingenious and high-tech solutions for material structures that meet the today’s requirements for resource efficient and consumer friendly products.

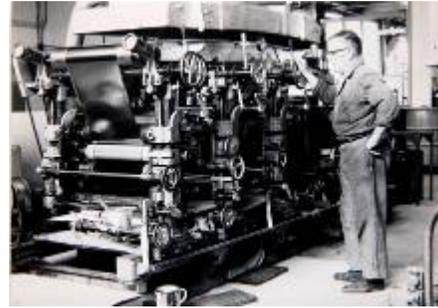


“This is opening new markets for this efficient and stylish material and we can be proud of our achievements in making alufoil a world class multi-functional, modern, and technically sophisticated material for packaging, household foil and a number of industrial markets,” concluded François Coëffic.

Over its 100 year history converters, brand owners, retailers and ultimate consumers have all benefited from alufoil’s unique barrier properties which provide a total block to light, moisture and aroma. Today it is used in every conceivable market from food and drink to pharmaceuticals. Applications include aseptic beverage cartons, sachets, pouches, lids, wrappers, blister and strip packs, foil containers and much more. And coming up over the horizon are even more markets and resource efficient options. These include microwaveable containers now gaining a foothold

throughout Europe and fascinating and technically innovative applications for pharmaceutical foils.

But none of this would have been possible without the vision of the early innovators. In the 1920s for example the dairy sector began to benefit from alufoil's advantages over the previously used tin foil: its chemical properties meant that it did not turn black when coming into contact with cheese and was some 20 % more economical than using tin. Other uses



included baking products where alufoil's non-stick properties came into their own, while by the mid-1930s the European alufoil sector began to produce rolls of household foil for the domestic kitchen as either a tear off product on rolls or as loose sheets in bags. Marketed as "sterile, free from bacteria, clean and trouble free, and reusable" alufoil's inroads into packaging markets continued up to the Second World War.

A spectacular period of growth in the 1950s and 1960s saw alufoil production quadruple, and both rolling speeds and rolling widths increasing dramatically, helping to feed demand. In the early 1950s as freezers became more affordable and began to appear in consumers' homes, TV Dinners, the forerunner of today's ready meals, packed in compartment alufoil trays began to shake up the food market. Developments such as these signposted the beginnings of a revolution in consumer convenience with alufoil used successfully for frozen foods, soup and stock cubes; and heat-sealable pouches for coffee, cocoa, tea and spices.

The 1960s heralded a number of major market developments where alufoil's protective properties against light and oxygen were used to good effect, for example thin alufoil was used in conjunction with paper and PE to create a laminate for aseptic cartons (Tetra Brik). And in 1978 the first use of an aluminium-plastic laminate took place for a well-known effervescent tablet for headaches. By the end of the 1990s alufoil was accepted as an innovative material for almost all packaging applications with expressions such as "foil-sealed for freshness" becoming commonplace on many branded packs.



Come the new millennium resource efficiency and even better consumer convenient options were the major goals for alufoil, as they were for all material sectors, converters, brand owners, retailers

and consumers. Successes in lightweighting led to material savings of more than 30 % in the 2000s, and in turn this has provided growth in markets for resource efficient packaging options, where its recyclability is also a major plus for customers and consumers alike.

Today alufoil's unique barrier properties are being merged increasingly with flexible films to create lightweight packs with excellent preservation properties and this has been instrumental in their use for a number of exciting new and expanding markets including pouches for everything from pet food to drinks; lidding applications; technically innovative solutions for pharmaceuticals; and the increasing acceptance of alufoil as a microwave safe material.



Aluminium foil has a unique combination of properties including barrier, deadfold and formability which have made it an essential part of many flexible packaging and container applications. Other uses of aluminium foil include automotive and heat exchange components, insulation material and many industrial applications.

The European Aluminium Foil Association is the international body representing companies engaged in the rolling and rewinding of alufoil and in the manufacture of alufoil containers and of all kind of flexible packaging. Its more than 100 members include companies in Western, Central and Eastern Europe.

A selection of 300dpi jpegs and further information about market and technical developments are available on request.

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