

# Aluminium Foil & Recycled Content

*Explanatory note – April 2019*



## **Aluminium is fully recyclable and the benefits of its recycling are clear**

- Aluminium is fully recyclable without loss of quality, it keeps the same properties after recycling and cannot be distinguished from virgin material
- The energy required to recycle aluminium is about 5% of that needed for primary production and the amount of energy saved (95%) corresponds with an equivalent saving of greenhouse gases
- The benefits are not only environmental, they are also economic. The value of aluminium material pays for its recycling.
- When available for recycling, aluminium scraps are recycled into new aluminium applications

## **The available quantity of end-of-life aluminium scrap today is limited**

- Due to the long lifespan of volume-wise dominant aluminium applications such as buildings and transport vehicles, the available quantity of end-of-life aluminium scrap today is limited
- 75% of all aluminium ever produced since the start of its industrial production is still in use.
- Because of continuous market growth, the current aluminium material demand cannot be filled by the available recycled aluminium from end-of-life scrap. The missing quantity has to be supplied by the primary aluminium industry.
- In Europe, about half of the aluminium produced originates from recycled materials.

## **Calling for high aluminium recycled content in specific applications will not result in a more circular economy.**

- What may work for other materials like paper or plastics does not work for aluminium. For materials which are losing properties after recycling, stimulating demand for recycled material provides an incentive to recycle. This does not work for aluminium as the limiting factor of recycling is above all the availability of scraps.
- Calling for high recycled content in specific aluminium applications will not change that situation.
- With the availability of recycled aluminium being limited, increasing the recycled content of an aluminium product is highly likely to result in decreasing the recycled content of another. And the overall environmental benefit is therefore nil.
- The benefit can even be negative in case of less optimized material flows resulting in increases in overall transportation distances and in the related burden on the environment.

## **Instead, encouraging end-of-life recycling is the right thing to do**

- To help aluminium material keep in the loop and remain available for further applications, it is critical to support proper collection, sorting and recycling of used products.
- The circularity performances of aluminium products are determined to a great extent by end of life recycling rates.

## **EAFA does not support the communication of recycled content figures at product level because of their low environmental relevance**

- Manufacturing a given aluminium foil product entirely or partially from recycled aluminium is technically possible.
- But this cannot serve as an indicator of the environmental performance of the product, even less as an argument for environmental claim.

## **Additional clarifications**

- A recycled content figure alone is not suited in the context of life-cycle assessments (LCA) of aluminium parts. For that purpose, a full LCA including end-of-life recycling credits is the most appropriate approach.
- ISO 14021 definition of recycled content includes only pre-consumer and post-consumer recycled content. This means that recycled aluminium issued from process scraps generated during foil rolling and slitting do not fall within this definition.