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European Commission delays EU packaging label rules until 2027

The move gives regulators time for public consultation before companies across the bloc redesign packaging for the new system

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The European Commission has delayed a key step in the rollout of new European Union packaging labels until the second quarter of 2027, giving regulators time to hold a public consultation before the rules are adopted, according to comments published Monday by On-Pack Recycling Label, or OPRL.

The delayed measure is the implementing act that will set out how labeling under the EU's Packaging and Packaging Waste Regulation, known as PPWR, will work in practice. It had originally been scheduled for publication on Aug. 12, 2026. OPRL, a U.K.-based packaging labeling group, said the Commission has now pushed that timetable back as work on the system continues.

The shift matters for companies that sell packaged goods across the EU because the future labels are meant to appear across the bloc and guide consumers on how to sort waste. The rules are also intended to identify reusable packaging, show which items are part of deposit return systems, and indicate recycled and bio-based content.

Jude Allan, managing director of OPRL, said the organization welcomed confirmation that the work is ongoing and that consultation will take place before implementation. In comments published by Sustainable Packaging News, Allan said OPRL wants to advise its members on the new requirements but also sees a need to test how the proposal will operate before it is finalized.

The delay offers more time for producers to prepare, but it also extends uncertainty for businesses that need to redesign packaging and labels. Under the PPWR framework, once the labeling implementing act is in force, packaging producers will have two years to make sure products are labeled correctly. Allan said that window will be difficult, especially for companies with large product portfolios.

She said one unresolved issue is whether the two-year deadline will apply to products already on store shelves or to packaging entering production after the rules take effect. That distinction could affect how quickly companies need to replace old designs, use up existing stock, or change printing runs and inventories.

The timing is particularly important for beverage makers, including wine, beer, spirits, and other packaged drinks sold in the EU, because label changes often have to be coordinated across many stock-keeping units, bottle sizes, multipacks, and export markets. For importers as well as EU-based producers, any final labeling rules could require updates not only to primary packaging but also to secondary and tertiary packaging used in transport and retail distribution.

OPRL said companies should begin preparing before the final rules are published. Allan said the first step is to understand the composition of packaging in detail, not just the main material but also other features that could affect recyclability. She also said businesses should review the countries where they trade so they can be ready for any national requirements that sit alongside the EU-wide system.

That warning reflects a broader challenge built into the PPWR. Although the regulation is intended to create a common framework across the bloc, producers still need to account for local waste systems, language needs, and any market-specific compliance rules. For drinks companies, that could mean a more complex redesign process for labels and outer packaging across multiple countries.

The coming changes to labeling are part of a wider packaging overhaul in Europe. OPRL said they will take effect alongside a phased move toward recyclable packaging formats and requirements for recycled content. That means companies may need to adjust not only the information printed on labels, but also the materials and formats they use.

For businesses in the United Kingdom that export to the EU, the delay does not remove the need to plan. OPRL said one expected challenge is that the labeling rules are likely to expand to all packaging, including secondary and tertiary packaging, not just the pack seen by shoppers. That would broaden the operational impact for manufacturers, distributors, and logistics providers.

Northern Ireland is expected to face a particular compliance issue because of the Windsor Framework, the arrangement that governs post-Brexit trade rules between Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland. OPRL said businesses trading in Northern Ireland are expected to apply the PPWR labels, which could force some companies to move earlier than others in the U.K. market.

Allan said that once the EU finalizes its system, the U.K. is expected to follow with its own packaging extended producer responsibility, or pEPR, labels. She said those labels are expected to align with the EU model, which could eventually reduce duplication for companies active in both markets. For businesses trading in Northern Ireland, she said, that may leave them ahead of others once the U.K. system is defined, even if they face

short-term difficulties.

The Commission’s decision to delay the implementing act until after consultation suggests officials are still working through how the labeling system should function in practice and how it will be understood by consumers. Allan said the industry should keep in mind that the changes are not only a challenge for producers but also a major adjustment for the public.

She said OPRL is carrying out consumer research to identify patterns of confusion and areas where the future system may need clearer communication. That work comes as companies across the packaging supply chain wait for the Commission to settle the final details that will determine how labels appear on products sold across the EU.