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PRESS STATEMENT

Disposable Nappies - No Worse for the Environment than Cloth Nappies

Environment Agency report shows there is little or no difference between the environmental impact of cloth nappies and disposable nappies

A Government commissioned life cycle assessment (LCA), co-ordinated by the UK Environment Agency, has been published today and shows through independent analysis that disposable nappies have no greater impact on the environment than cloth nappies.

Specifically, the study confirms:

- Neither disposable or cloth nappy systems can claim overall environmental superiority
- The differences in the impacts between the three nappy systems¹ are not significant enough to voice support for one nappy type over the other on the basis of environmental factors alone.

The Environment Agency states “The study, which looks at and evaluates the environmental impacts arising from every stage of the life cycle of disposable and reusable nappies, found that there was little or nothing to choose between them. The study, which was carried out by independent environmental consultants, is the most comprehensive and thorough independent study of its kind ever undertaken.”

Tracy Stewart, Director General of the Absorbent Hygiene Products Manufacturers Association (AHPMA) commented: “AHPMA welcomes this independent and conclusive study, which will be a source of reassurance for many parents and can finally lay to rest many of the exaggerated and misleading claims made by some organisations about the environmental impact of disposable nappies.”

The disposable nappy industry acknowledges the contribution of disposable nappies to total solid waste in the order of 0.1%². The LCA study, however, confirms that “for all three systems the impacts from waste management do not contribute substantially to the overall totals...” Disposable nappies are compatible with prevailing forms of waste management, some of which may be waste to energy solutions, and the industry is encouraged by Central and Local Government’s efforts to broaden their views on waste treatment options beyond landfill.

Product performance improvements and product innovation have decreased the weight of disposable nappies by around 40% over the past 15 years which has also contributed to a reduction in the amount of waste they create, and industry is committed to explore further improvement.

Tracy Stewart continues: “We question why the Government is spending £2.6 million³ of UK tax payers’ money promoting cloth nappy schemes through the Waste Resources Action Programme (WRAP) in the absence of any proven overall environmental benefit or of any independent audit of the schemes to understand the likelihood of their success. With the small percentage contribution that disposable nappies make to landfilled waste, and remembering that disposable nappies are the choice of around 95% of UK parents, we consider the funds allocated by central government to promote cloth nappy schemes disproportionate to any real waste benefits that could possibly be gained.”

For further information or to review our recently published Sustainability Review contact Tracy Stewart at AHPMA on Tel: (01483) 418221 or visit www.nappyinformationservice.co.uk or www.hapco.edana.org

The Environment Agency press statement can be read at www.environment-agency.gov.uk/news/1072187?lang=e®ion=&projectstatus=&theme=&subject=&searchfor=&topic=&area=&month= and the Executive Summary and full Report can be read at www.environment-agency.gov.uk/science/922316/?version=1&lang=e

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ISSUED BY: Tracy Stewart AHPMA. Tel : (01483) 418221 Email: stewart.t@ahpma.co.uk

EDITORS NOTES:

¹ The three nappy systems assessed were disposable nappies, home laundered cloth nappies, and commercially laundered cloth nappies.

² Disposable nappies make up 2.4% of household waste (Government Strategy Unit Report ‘Waste Not Want Not’ November 2002.) Household waste represents 4% of total solid waste. By calculation therefore, disposable nappies make up 0.1% of total solid waste.

³ £2.6 million from the Department of Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA) has been allocated to WRAP for its nappy waste minimisation scheme.

The UK Government has also committed additional funds to cloth nappy schemes:

- £650,000 from Scottish Executive to WRAP
- £140,000 to West Sussex County Council’s nappy scheme, currently in its fourth year. At the outset of this scheme the then Environment Minister Mr Meacher pledged that the scheme would be self-funding.
- £28,217 to the Bradford Real Nappy Project
- £149,350 to Naturally Best Real Nappy Service
- £55,000 to the Oldham Real Nappy Project
- £8,000 to the Shropshire Real Nappy Network

The Environment Agency states 'The only fair way to compare the environmental performance of different types of nappy is across their whole life cycle. This means taking into account all the environmental impacts that result from the production of raw materials, the manufacture of the products through to their laundering, use and final disposal.' Link to the report www.environment-agency.gov.uk/science/922316/?version=1&lang=e

A Life Cycle Assessment is a tool to assess the potential environmental impacts of products systems at all stages in their life cycle – from extraction of resources, through production and use of the product, to re-use, recycling or final disposal. The LCA has been conducted in accordance with the requirements of the International Organisation for Standardisation (ISO) in its ISO 14040-43 standards, and has been used to report the environmental aspects associated with cloth and disposable nappies.

The Absorbent Hygiene Products Manufacturers Association (AHPMA) is the trade association that represents the key UK manufacturers of disposable nappies, feminine care and continence care products. Member companies are Accantia Health and Beauty Ltd, Arquest Ltd, Johnson & Johnson GmbH, Kimberly-Clark Europe Ltd, Multibrands Ltd, Ontex Retail UK Ltd, Playtex Products Inc, Procter & Gamble UK, SCA Hygiene Products UK Ltd., Toiletry Sales Ltd.

The summary of the LCA (which assesses disposable nappy systems, home laundered cloth systems and commercial cloth laundry systems) quotes the following: "For all three [nappy] systems, the major impact areas, in terms of scale of contribution, have been identified as non-renewable resource depletion, acidification, and global warming. [...] Global warming and non-renewable resource depletion impacts, over the 2.5 years for which a child is assumed to be using nappies, are comparable with driving a car between 1300 and 2200 miles "

Environment Agency project board members for the LCA are:

Terry Coleman (Chairman) - the Environment Agency

Stewart Begg – Absorbent Hygiene Products Manufacturers Association (AHPMA)

Geoff Davies – Swindon Unitary Authority

Joanne Freer – Cotton Bottoms

Ioannis Hatzopoulos – Procter & Gamble GmbH

Ann Link – Women's Environmental Network (WEN)

Joanna Marchant – The Environment Agency

Gillian Neville – DEFRA

Vicki Portman – Plush Pants (one meeting)

Gina Purman – Real Nappy Association

Web links:

- www.nappyinformationservice.co.uk
- www.environment-agency.gov.uk
- www.hapco.edana.org