

# GENERAL NOTICE 2

## Impact of metallised decorations obtained by foil stamping or transfer on the sorting of paper/cardboard packaging

### SUMMARY

This general notice aims to assess the behaviour in sorting centres of paper/cardboard packaging featuring a metallised decoration obtained by foil stamping or transfer.



In sorting centres, paper/cardboard packaging (consisting of more than 50% paper/cardboard) is intended to be directed to the recycling stream for non-laminated paper/cardboard or for laminated paper/cardboard. The presence of a metallised decoration obtained by foil stamping or transfer on this packaging may disrupt its routing to these recycling streams. COCET checked the impact of these metallised decorations on:

- metal sorting, particularly during capture by an Eddy current machine
- the reading of the infrared signal emitted and received by the optical sorting machine

**Paper/cardboard packaging with a metallised decoration obtained by foil stamping or transfer is not captured by the Eddy current machine during the separation of non-magnetic metals.**

**Furthermore, the routing of this packaging by optical sorting:**

- **Is acceptable if the decoration covers up to 25% of the packaging surface**
- **Is unacceptable if the decoration covers over 50% of the packaging surface**

To ensure that paper/cardboard packaging with a metallised decoration obtained by foil stamping or transfer is directed to the appropriate stream, COCET recommends not exceeding a coverage rate of 25% for this type of decoration.

This notice pertains solely to the behaviour of the packaging in sorting centres and provides no indication of the impact of the issue studied during the recycling of this packaging in its respective stream.

## I Context

This notice seeks to assess the impact on sorting of a metallised decoration or foil stamping on paper/cardboard household packaging. It concerns the following techniques:

- **Hot/cold foil stamping**, which involves locally applying a thin metallic layer comprising just a few microns of metal, most often aluminium, of the required shape and size onto a substrate. In both cases, the metal's supporting structure, generally a polyester film of variable thickness, is not attached to the metal during application and does not remain on the packaging.
- **Hot/cold transfer**, which involves locally applying a metallic layer in the desired shape using adhesive. This is a two-stage process: first, the adhesive is applied in the desired shape, then the film is applied. The adhesive application stage determines the final shape of the design: it enables the film to adhere solely to the required area.

These techniques address an aesthetic requirement and create a surface decoration featuring a "metallic effect".

Sectors concerned with this type of metallised packaging include cosmetics, luxury, chocolate, deli products, etc.

COCET carried out optical sorting tests to assess the impact of the presence of foil stamping on the surface of paper/cardboard packaging.

This notice does not concern:

- Paper/cardboard packaging with a metallised decoration obtained using other technologies (metallised lamination, addition of an aluminium layer, metallic inks, etc.)
- Paper/cardboard packaging featuring a metallised barrier sandwiched between a layer of paper/cardboard and another layer (paper/cardboard or plastic), such as cartons or multilayer flexible packaging.

## 2 Scope of the notice

This notice concerns the routing of paper/cardboard packaging with a metallised surface decoration obtained by foil stamping or transfer in sorting centres. It does not assess its suitability for recycling in paper/cardboard packaging streams.

The identified risks of disruption for packaging with this type of metallised decoration are the separation of non-magnetic metals by Eddy current machine (ECM) and material separation (by optical sorting machine). The study of how this packaging behaves in sorting centres therefore focused on these two stages.



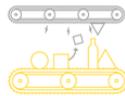
**TROMMEL**  
Separation by size



**BALISTIC**  
Separation by shape



**EDDY CURRENT MACHINE**  
Separation of non-magnetic metals



**OVERBAND**  
Separation of magnetic metals



**OPTICAL SORTING**  
Separation by material and colour (infrared)



**QUALITY CONTROL**  
Manual sorting by material, shape and colour



**BALING**  
Compaction and baling for shipping

Stage studied in this notice

### 3 Tests performed

Sorting tests were performed to understand how the presence of a metallised decoration obtained by foil stamping or transfer on plastic/cardboard packaging would affect its routing during the sorting process.

A metallised decoration obtained by foil stamping or transfer requires the application of a very thin metallic layer comprising just a few microns of metal. This technique allows the application of partial decorations on paper/cardboard surfaces.

#### 3.1 Separation of non-magnetic metals

This packaging has not been tested with ECMs in sorting centres. However, given the low metal content and the negative results obtained on paper/cardboard packaging with metallised decorations obtained using other technologies that apply a larger amount of metal (particularly aluminised plastic lamination – see AG 1), it is possible to extrapolate these results and conclude that such packaging would not be detected by the Eddy current machine, which is used to separate non-magnetic metals. This conclusion is supported by feedback from sorting centres.

A metallised decoration obtained by foil stamping or transfer does not result in the packaging being routed to the aluminium recycling stream, as the quantities of aluminium are insufficient.

#### 3.2 Optical sorting

Static and dynamic optical sorting tests were conducted at optical sorting machine manufacturers to assess the impact of these decorations on the detection and routing of the packaging at this stage.

Several foil coverage rates were tested on cardboard boxes, ranging from 25% to 75% of the packaging:

- The static tests showed that the areas covered by foil were not detected by optical sorting. The infrared beam was unable to pass through the layer of metal and identify the underlying material.
- During dynamic tests, we observed that the lower the foil coverage rate, the more the packaging is routed towards its target stream:
  - The sorting of packaging with a metallised decoration obtained by foil stamping covering 25% of the surface is acceptable.
  - The sorting of packaging with a metallised decoration obtained by foil stamping covering 50% of the surface is unacceptable. The routing is even worse when the coverage reaches 75%.

A metallised decoration obtained by foil stamping or transfer covering less than 25% of the packaging surface enables acceptable routing of paper/cardboard packaging to its recycling stream.

However, if the decoration covers over 50% of the packaging surface, its routing to its recycling stream is unacceptable.

#### Assessing the behaviour of the packaging tested during optical sorting (OS)

Parameter studied	Routing rate during OS	COCET's assessment
Coverage rate by foil stamping or transfer $\leq$ 25%	Over 80%	Acceptable
Coverage rate by foil stamping or transfer $>$ 25%	Lower than 80%	Unacceptable

### Impact during sorting stages

Sorting stage	Impact	Description
 TROMMEL	∅	
 BASLISTIC	∅	
 EDDY CURRENT	✓	No capture by the ECM <sup>1</sup> .
 OVERBAND	∅	
 OPTICAL SORTING	⚠	If the decoration covers over 25% of the packaging: optical reading is disrupted. The routing of the packaging towards its respective recycling stream is unacceptable.
 QUALITY CONTROL	∅	
 BALING	∅	

 No impact  
  Caution  
  Not tested or not concerned

## CONCLUSION

Given the current state of equipment and sorting techniques available in France, a metallised decoration obtained by foil stamping or transfer may disrupt the sorting process. If the decoration covers up to 25% of the packaging surface, sorting remains **acceptable**.

CO CET may review this notice in light of developments in sorting technologies, markets or quality requirements for recycled material.

<sup>1</sup> Eddy current machine