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HAPPY FEET SENDS WRONG ENVIRONMENTAL MESSAGE

The animated film, Happy Feet, is a hit at the box office, however, ITW Hi-Cone has expressed concern to the film's producer, Warner Brothers, that the movie misleads the public about risks for wildlife endangerment from improperly discarded plastic-ring beverage carriers.

"Since the late 1980s, we've been trying to correct misperceptions about ring carriers by working with scientific and environmental organizations to communicate how advances in plastics technology have made them completely photodegradable," said Steve Henn, Vice President and General Manager, ITW Hi-Cone. "It's a shame the producers of Happy Feet didn't do their homework on this subject. They could have visited the Children's Museum in Chicago or other exhibits around the country to learn that plastic rings almost disintegrate from exposure to the sun's ultraviolet rays."

In the film, one of the animated penguin characters, voiced by Robin Williams, returns to his habitat with a ring carrier around his neck. "That's a misleading and irresponsible characterization," said Henn. He explained that plastic rings exposed to sun, wind and rain will break apart. The risk for wildlife endangerment, therefore, is almost nonexistent today because the photodegradable rings lose their strength and become brittle, even when floating on water.

According to Henn, there is vast scientific evidence showing that the special polymer used to produce Hi-Cone plastic ring carriers makes them 100 percent photodegradable. The sun's ultraviolet rays break up the chemical bonds in the polymers and shorten the molecular chains. As a result, the brittle plastic breaks apart into small pieces.

Henn added that Hi-Cone's award-winning Ring Leader recycling program in North America encourages proper disposal of ring carriers in schools and workplaces. Since its inception in 1991, tons of plastic rings have been processed for recycling and the material is used in production of photodegradable ring carriers and other products.

Henn related that Hi-Cone's communications with Warner Brothers have been cordial and are ongoing.

"We don't want anyone who sees Happy Feet to become concerned about purchasing beverages in plastic ring carriers," said Henn. "Compared with other packaging, such as shrink and paperboard, ring carriers generate the least amount of solid and water-borne waste. It is the most environment friendly package option for the beverage consumers."



Environmental Facts on Hi-Cone Plastic Ring Carriers

- All Hi-Cone plastic ring carriers sold worldwide are made from a special low-density polyethylene plastic, which is 100 percent photodegradable.
- Exposure to the sun's ultraviolet rays causes the rings to weaken and become brittle. Wind and rain will break up the brittle carrier into small pieces.
- When exposed to summer sunlight, a photodegradable plastic ring carrier will begin to lose its strength in a short period of time and become totally brittle in about three weeks. This process takes longer in cloudy, cold winter weather.
- Once a ring carrier has been weakened by ultraviolet rays it poses minimal risk to wildlife. Since the carrier floats, photodegradation occurs on water as well as land.
- Hi-Cone has introduced a zipper opening feature on some of its carriers. This facilitates container removal by breaking the rings and also mitigates potential for wildlife endangerment.
- Hi-Cone carriers are non-toxic and meet the most stringent US and European toxicity standards for lead, cadmium, mercury, hexavalent chromium and other metals and chemicals known to be toxic at certain levels.
- Of the three major packages used for beverage multipacks (ring carriers, shrink wrap and paperboard), ring carriers generate the least amount of solid and water-borne waste, use less energy and release the fewest emissions into the environment.
- Hi-Cone collects used ring carriers throughout North America through its award-winning Ring Leader Recycling Program. Recycled rings are processed and converted into new material for production of photodegradable ring carriers and other products.
- For open-loop recyclers, Hi-Cone ring carriers can be commingled with other compatible plastics and recycled into a variety of different products.
- Further information about Hi-Cone recycling is available at www.ringleader.com