

Bulletin – 3M™ 1200 Earplugs Packaging Change

Background

CE Approvals

All hearing protectors sold in Europe with the purpose of protecting the wearer against harmful noise (acting as Personal Protective Equipment) must be CE approved. As part of this European CE Certification, all earplugs which are classed as reusable, must also be supplied with packaging for the individual earplugs that is reusable.

What is reusable packaging?

A reusable earplug package is anything which safely houses the product and can do so for a period of time. It is not packaging that is typically disposed of immediately, such as a small plastic bag.

The packaging itself is specified and determined by the manufacturer to be fit for purpose.

Whilst the requirement to have reusable packaging is included in EN352 Part 2, the standard does not mandate any specifics of the packaging. For example, the standard does not state what material the packaging should be made from or how long it should last.

The standard only recommends that:

- ▶ It must be reusable
- ▶ It can be repeatedly opened and closed
- ▶ It is the right size to store the product

The packaging can be submitted with the technical file when the product is certified or the notified body can request a sample for validation. Ultimately it is the manufacturers decision to choose the appropriate packaging for the product, in line with the above.

How long does the reusable plug last for?

Reusable earplugs can be a great way to reduce waste and costs.

You can wash and wear the earplugs for longer periods than disposable earplugs.

For example, the 3M™ 1271 and 1261 and 3M™ E-A-R™ UltraFit™ earplugs can be washed up to 50 times.

If you equate a day to a wash, that is 1 x pair of earplugs for 50 x washes/days compared to say 50 x disposable earplugs. It could even be more than the 50 x disposable earplugs, depending on how frequently you change and dispose of your earplugs, for example, if you use 2 x pairs of disposable earplugs a day, you could save 100 x disposable earplugs, and so on.

Where does the packaging come into this?

Reusable earplugs are commonly sold in plastic boxes, which can be made from Polypropylene or polyethylene.

Mainly because it is a rigid plastic material that makes good, strong cases which will protect the earplugs and will last. As a consequence, a robust container may outlast the earplug.

If you need to replace your earplugs, but the case you have now is fine, what do you do? Providing a plastic case with every earplug may not be necessary and could contribute to unnecessary plastic manufacture and waste.



What has 3M done?

Earlier every pair of 3M™ 1271 and 1261 earplugs included a blue polypropylene plastic case.

We have changed the packaging to mirror the 3M™ E-A-R™ UltraFit™ earplugs (Product SKU 7000038199). Instead of supplying each pair with a plastic box, each pair will be packed in a reusable cardboard pillow pack. This is the same packaging that UltraFit earplugs have been sold in for many years.

Due to the nature of the material, these cardboard pillow packs are not as strong as the plastic boxes, however, they are fully compliant with the requirement of the European standard for reclose able packaging and deemed fit for purpose as assessed by the notified body. If cared for, and earplugs are dried after washing before putting back in the pack, they can last for the duration of the earplug usage.

We are aware that people's jobs and styles are different and a pillow pack may not work for all applications or people. With this in mind, we will instead offer the polypropylene plastic case as a separate item, but the colour will now be clear and not opaque blue.



3M™ E-A-R™ UltraFit™ earplugs pillow pack

Why is 3M making this change?

We are providing more options for how you want to manage your packaging. This gives you the flexibility to choose if you want the polypropylene box, and if you do choose it, use only what you need. If you only used the pillow pack container the product is supplied in, you would cut out the plastic box packaging totally.

We do not make any life cycle or duration of use claims for the polypropylene box. However, if cared for the current 3M™ 1271 and 1261 plastic earplug boxes can outlast the earplugs. If you used 1 x plastic box for every 2 x pairs of earplugs or even 3 x pairs of earplugs, you could reduce the plastic box manufacture and consumption by half or even two thirds.

What does this look like?

If 200 earplug wearers used 1 x plastic box for every 3 x pairs of 1200 earplugs they would cut their plastic reduction in a working year by nearly 9 kilograms. If they stopped using the boxes all together that would be 13 kilograms.



The average pineapple weighs around 1 kilogram, visual used here for illustration of waste reduction

We all want to do our part to reduce wastage, even in small ways. With this change and careful use and care of our equipment, we could help reduce some plastic packaging manufacture and waste. Please work with your 3M representative to discuss the product and packaging options available to help in any of your sustainability goals.

FAQs

What are the new Earplug codes?

3M SAP ID	Description
7100288287	3M™ 1271 Earplugs, CE approved, corded reusable earplugs, 1 x pair per pillow pack, 50 x pairs per case
7100288286	3M™ 1261 Earplugs , CE approved, uncorded reusable earplugs, 1 x pair per pillow pack, 50 x pairs per case
7100317692	3M™ Earplug Storage Box, transparent



Can I recycle the pillow pack box?

Yes. The 1200 pillow packs are made from cardboard which, depending on your local regulations on waste and disposal, is recyclable. As of 2023 all 3M hearing protection packaging is marked with a recycle symbol which provides guidance on what the material is made from, if you can recycle it and how it should be disposed of.

Can I recycle the reusable polypropylene box?

Yes. Polypropylene is a versatile rigid plastic material that can typically be recycled. Please refer to your local regulations on waste and disposal.

Why did you change the reusable box colour from blue to transparent / clear?

Discontinuing the blue box means we will only offer one colour and model. This will eliminate colour transition time, meaning we improve our manufacture efficiencies with less energy and wastage. It also improves recyclability of the box.

FROM:



TO:



Will I make a saving if I buy the reusable boxes separately?

It will depend on how many boxes you buy and how you care for them. This is true for both money and packaging wastage. Careful use and care of our equipment can help extend its life and reduce unnecessary spend and wastage.

Can I use this reusable box for any other products?

Yes, this box will fit most of 3Ms earplugs. Meaning you can use it to house any of the plugs during down time or replace any other boxes which are damaged or lost.

Where can I go to learn more about 3M sustainability efforts?

Visit https://www.3m.co.uk/3M/en_GB/sustainability-uk/ for more information.

Important notice

Product Selection and Use: Many factors beyond 3M's control and uniquely within user's knowledge and control can affect the use and performance of a 3M product in a particular application. As a result, customer is solely responsible for evaluating the product and determining whether it is appropriate and suitable for customer's application, including conducting a workplace hazard assessment and reviewing all applicable national and/or European regulations and standards. Failure to properly evaluate, select, and use a 3M product in accordance with all applicable instructions and with appropriate safety equipment, or to meet all applicable safety regulations, may result in injury, sickness, death, and/or harm to property.

Warranty, Limited Remedy, and Disclaimer: A limitation of liability applies to the 3M product(s). For warranty statement and limitation of liability, refer to your supply agreement or the 3M terms & conditions of sale .

3M industrial and occupational products are intended, labeled, and packaged for sale to trained industrial and occupational customers for workplace use.

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