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PaperTitle **On the Road to Zero Waste – Changes in Packaging as part of Woolworths' Good Business Journey**

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#### ABSTRACT

Severe landfill airspace crises and growing consumer activism and awareness in South Africa have put product packaging in the spotlight as the cause of too much pollution and littering. In the past the choice of packaging material and its design was almost exclusively focused on economic considerations and towards extended maximum product life-span. Little thought was given to the “after life” performance of the packaging material itself, the embodied energy lost through simply burying packaging that was once derived from valuable resources that are now becoming scarce.

The future National Integrated Waste Management Bill Product will demand Extended Producer Responsibility from the industries which are responsible for the waste crises in the first place and the Packaging Industry will be a key partner to work with to bring much needed change towards “environmentally intelligent product design” for packaging that can easily be recovered, reused and recycled as a technical nutrient (rather than valueless waste) in a closed loop system.

This presentation gives a short introduction into systems thinking as part of the Natural Step and the Next Industrial Revolution philosophy which advocate that if “waste becomes food” for another natural or technical neighboring system, then it is not a problem. It further explains how Woolworths in the Cape Town headquarters and two trial retail stores have embraced this thinking as part of their Good Business Journey and the impact this creates on future choices of packaging materials and their designs. Waste generation baselines from before and after practical waste minimisation intervention based on prevention, reuse and recycling will clearly show dramatic improvements and provide a strong economic argument to take waste minimisation (and product re-design as a key strategy for it) serious. Imagineers are now emerging in the field of new packaging designs who understand the true implications of Enviroeconomics and how triple bottomline sustainability considerations need to become entrenched in a new generation of packaging materials. Woolworths understands this and is undergoing dramatic corporate changes that have already started to create a ripple effect on the future product choices and their packaging. The presentation ends by introducing the delegate to some of the new types of packaging that will be introduced at Woolworths as early as the end of this year and will discuss future trends and strategies that are currently being discussed by the management.