

Packages that need a makeover

SOME PACKAGES have been annoying for so long that it seems as if manufacturers are teasing us all. Why, in 2013, must consumers open a box of farina pretty much as they have for decades, by pushing in a cutout on the side of the box? How many times have you opened a bag of chips only to have it split and spill the contents?

Patrick Reynolds, editor of the trade publication *Packaging World*, blames economics. "These are mostly low-margin, commodity products that yield small profits," he says. "There isn't a lot of motivation for companies to rip out equipment in their plants that's bought and paid for and invest in new machinery, no matter how horrible the packaging." Frito-Lay, for instance, abandoned an experiment to outfit snack bags with a resealable zippered closure because of cost, says Joe Angel, publisher of *Packaging World*, and besides, "they want people to eat all the chips all at once."

We've rounded up some familiar culprits and contacted companies to find out why they couldn't do better.



Comet Cleanser

The issue. The cardboard container and metal top deteriorate in moisture, and powder kicks up through holes in the nonclosable lid when you set it down.

The company's response.

The limitations of the container are by design, to make it recyclable.



Gold Medal Flour

The issue. The flour is tightly packed into a delicate paper sack that's tricky to handle without tearing or making a mess.

The company's response. "It's very classic and the way it's always been," a customer-service rep said. "And flour is an openly traded commodity. We don't make much money on it."



The safe way to get rid of expired drugs

Medicine is good. Once it has expired? Not so much. Hence the reason for National Take-Back Day on Oct. 26, 2013, from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m. At designated sites—a pharmacy, police station, or school, for instance—you can drop off unwanted, unused, or expired medications. The program is free and anonymous, and accepts most prescription drugs. (To find a collection site near you, go to dea.gov and click on Drug Disposal, then Got Drugs?) In three years of semiannual collections, more than 1,400 tons of

prescription meds have been collected and incinerated, according to the Drug Enforcement Administration.

Why turn in old drugs?

They may have lost effectiveness or directions for their use may have changed (for example, the Food and Drug Administration no longer recommends that kids under 2 years old take cough or cold medicines). And it's just a bad idea to have leftover painkillers hanging around—they could contribute to a family member's or friend's drug-abuse problem.

"Everything we do is geared toward protecting American families and communities," DEA Administrator Michele Leonhart says. "By removing unwanted prescription drugs from their homes, the public helps prevent experimentation, addiction, overdose, and even death."

There are reasons to go to a take-back site instead of tossing the medications yourself. Throwing drugs in the trash lets kids and pets get at them, and a wastebasket is a likely place for drug abusers to check after they've looked in the medicine cabinet. Flushing drugs down a toilet? Generally a bad idea. Some organizations cite human health concerns; others cite evidence that flushed

drugs can cause deformities in fish, such as reproductive abnormalities among smallmouth bass. There's no definitive evidence to suggest adverse human health effects, but the FDA wants to minimize drug residues in the public water supply.

Proposed rules by the DEA would expand disposal options to include mail-back programs and receptacles at pharmacies or long-term-care facilities. But although the public comment period closed last February, those rules have yet to become permanent.

If you miss a take-back day and want to dispose of pills on your own, follow these suggestions:

- Remove all personal information and drug names from the label.
- Take medications out of their original bottles and mix them in another container (like an empty margarine tub) with an undesirable substance, such as cooking oil, coffee grounds, or cat litter. Then seal the container and throw it in the trash outside.
- To see an FDA list of medications so potentially harmful to others that they should be flushed once expired, go to fda.gov, click on Drugs, and type "flush drugs" into the search window.

