

TOM ORKISZ, PRESIDENT AND CEO, INLINE PLASTICS



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The new year has brought enormous changes in legislation across the country regarding materials used in foodservice packaging. As of Dec. 31, 2022, New York State has banned the sale of paper-based plates, cups, bowls and other food packaging with intentionally added PFAS (perfluoroalkyl and polyfluoroalkyl substances) under the Hazardous Packaging Act. California's new AB 1200 law bans the use of PFAS in paper, paperboard, and other plant-based food packaging as of Jan. 1, 2023. It also requires manufacturers of such packaging to use "the least toxic alternative" when replacing PFAS.

The nation's restaurant and food-service operators will need to understand the changes in the laws and how to build a compliant packaging strategy. With that in mind, Total Food Service sought out Inline Plastics President and CEO Tom Orkisz to get his thoughts on the packaging marketplace and suggested solutions for the future.

Can you please share an overview of Inline Plastics' history with our readers?

Inline Plastics is the leading manufacturer of innovative, high quality, crystal clear, food packaging. With more than 50-years in the industry, we transformed the marketplace in the early 2000's with our Safe-T-Fresh® line, a tamper-resistant and tamper-evident product. Safe-T-Fresh utilizes our patented tear-strip technology, providing retailers and consumers with greater protection of the contents. With the recent launch of our Safe-T-Chef®, the food service market now has options never before available – a product line of tamper-evident, tamper resistant polypropylene packaging for hot food applications. We continue to design and manufacture packaging solutions that keep food products safe, fresh, and enhance shelf merchandising. We also offer the most complete line of automated equipment to load, close and label our packaging.

What was the niche that Inline saw when the company launched? How has that niche expanded?

We found our niche in the mid-1980's by working to continuously understand the needs of the marketplace, and then combining technology and ingenuity to develop industry-changing solutions. We pride ourselves on maintaining a culture of constant innovation. Our Surelock® packaging was the first product that took the food market by storm. It brought huge success and fast growth in 1985. Our Safe-T-Fresh® line in 2004 revolutionized the marketplace with the first tamper-evident and tamper-resistant packaging. Then in 2022, we launched Safe-T-Chef®, the first polypropylene packaging for hot food applications that includes our patented tamper-resistant tear strip. For more than half a century, we have led the way with innovative solutions that meet retailer and consumer needs.

Walk us through the highlights of Inline's product portfolio?

Our product catalog is currently segmented into three brand categories. Safe-T-Fresh® and Safe-T-Chef® are the two families that incorporate our patented tear-strip technology. Essentials® is the third family, which is home to favorites like SureLock®, Crystal Fresh® and Visibly Fresh®. Across all families, we offer a variety of shapes, sizes, compartments, and features, that are available for a wide variety of market and product applications. With hundreds of SKUs, we offer a packaging option for every want and need.

You've been an industry innovator in creating tamper-evident/resistant solutions. Why has that been a priority?

Tamper-evident technology provides peace of mind. It is an easy-to-identify component of a package that lets the consumer know the contents

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Tamper Evident & Tamper Resistant: as Easy as 1, 2, 3

- 1 Fill
- 2 Close
- 3 Remove tear strip



have not been tampered with once it was packaged. We revolutionized the marketplace when we introduced Safe-T-Fresh® with our patented tear-strip technology almost two decades ago. Today, we offer hundreds of shapes and sizes with this extra level of safety and security, so there is always a packaging solution that will fit the individual needs of the retailer and consumer.

Inline has also been on the forefront of green and sustainable solutions. Walk us through that evolution?

It all circles back to our long-standing commitment to innovation. As we look to pioneer new ideas and new technologies, green and sustainable initiatives dove-tail perfectly with our goals. It's been a multi-faceted approach over the last decade. From installing over 2600 solar panels to help power our Shelton, CT headquarters and manufacturing facility, to developing single-serve packaging options that eliminate food-waste and increase shelf life. We made sure our products are easily recyclable, where recycling is available. We are continuously educating consumers on the importance of putting packaging back into the recycling stream. But the most significant advancement is our "reborn" initiative. In 2020, We were the first food packaging thermoformer to use post-consumer content derived from Advanced Recycling (recycling at the molecular level). All of our products currently use 10% post-consumer content, which will increase as more supply becomes available. Our material, rDPET™, has the lowest carbon footprint thanks to its patented energy efficient manufacturing process, and by using less virgin materials, we are promoting a circular economy that keeps packaging out of landfills.

How did the explosive growth of takeout and delivery through Covid impact your product mix?

Food safety is not a new concern for us. Our tamper-evident technology has been a sought-after feature for two decades. But since COVID,

we've seen across-the-board growth in the demand for pre-packaged goods, particularly those with extra layers of security, like our extensive portfolio of Safe-T-Fresh options. However, our recent launch of Safe-T-Chef now gives takeout and delivery producers even greater options, as it is the first tamper-evident, tamper-resistant polypropylene packaging product line for hot applications. As consumers continue to look for convenient packaging that offers the food safety they desire, our extensive catalog of products means retailers will have the right packaging solution available to meet the demands of their consumers.

You're in a crazy competitive marketplace. How do you keep from being commoditized and not just shopped for price?

Our reputation for quality, clarity and innovation sets us apart from the rest of the marketplace. It has a longevity and a history of delivering packaging solutions that provides safety, promotes merchandising, extends freshness, and continues to expand with a growing variety of shapes and sizes to meet every need. Our customer service is also unmatched. Our Innovation Center and Automation Teams are staffed with experts bringing years of experience to creating solutions. Bring us your packaging problem or challenge, then let us solve it.

How does customization and printing enable you to differentiate from the competition?

Many of the products in our catalog are the result of customers bringing a problem, and then our Innovation Center team developing a solution. Multiple compartments to mix and match foods, add-ons for dips and dressings, rigid sides for better merchandising and stackability, are just a few examples. What comes to us as a challenge for one customer needing a custom solution, results in a new feature or product line that the entire marketplace benefits from.

This year, we are seeing a number of rollouts for PFAS free product? What has Inline's strategy been?

PET and PP products that we manufacture do not contain PFAS. We go even further with active monitoring for the latest scientific developments. This includes stringently and proactively complying with all regulations by the FDA for food-grade packaging as they apply to our manufacturing processes.

2022 was marked by real supply chain issues. How have you been able to keep your customers happy?

Remember, we started as a base-ment operation in the 1950s. Over the course of six decades, we have faced our fair share of challenges. These have included: expansion across the United States and internationally, developing long-lasting and quality relationships with both suppliers and customers, mergers and acquisitions, multiple new product line releases, and most recently, a transition into

incorporating sustainability initiatives as part of our corporate identity. To put it simply, we look at challenges as opportunities. We know that by combining our deep roots with a culture of innovation and adaptability, we will always find a way to continue providing the products and service our customers expect. These core values are what sustained this company for over 50 years and why we are able to thrive throughout these recent challenges and will continue to do so in the years to come.

What is the next step for an operator/distributor that would like more info on the Inline product line?

They can start by visiting our website at InlinePlastics.com to browse our extensive product catalog, see the latest releases and features, and connect with our sales, automation and R&D teams with any questions. Our customer experience team is always available.