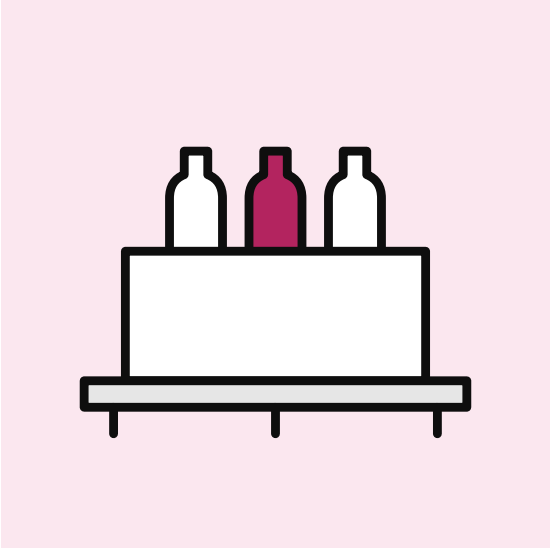
Model

Primary, secondary and tertiary packaging

A classification of packaging into three levels by function: primary forms the sales unit, secondary groups several units and tertiary is used to transport them.



In Spanish
Niveles del envase

Origin
European Directive 94/62/EC (1994); restructured by Regulation (EU) 2025/40

What problem it addresses

A product usually travels inside several packages at once, and each has a different job. Packaging design takes from it the habit of thinking about all three together, not only the one seen in the store.

Components

Primary or sales packaging

The unit the shopper takes home: the bottle, the can, the cereal box.

Secondary or grouped packaging

Groups several units, to sell them together or to restock the shelf, and can be removed without affecting the product.

Tertiary or transport packaging

Makes it easier to move many units without damage, like cases and pallets. It does not include road, rail, ship or air containers.

How it works

1 

Start with the primary, which protects the product and presents it to the shopper;

2 

think about how it is grouped, on the shelf and in the warehouse;

3 

and how it travels, stacked in cases and on pallets all the way to the store.

Applications in design

Use it like this

Design the three levels together: the primary should fit the grouping case, and the case the pallet, with no gaps.

Avoid

Grouping or shipping boxes full of air: the 2025 EU regulation sets a maximum of 50% empty space for them.

Don't fall for it

More layers is not more protection: each level must have a function; if it doesn't, it's surplus.

Connections

Used in

- Life cycle assessment (LCA)
- Ecodesign

Authors and works

1994	**European Parliament and Council of the EU**	Directive 94/62/EC defined what packaging is and divided it into three types: sales or primary, grouped or secondary, and transport or tertiary.
2025	**European Parliament and Council of the EU**	Regulation (EU) 2025/40, which applies from August 2026 and repeals the directive, keeps the three levels without changing their substance and names them only by their function.

Sources

Original sources

- Directiva 94/62/CE del Parlamento Europeo y del Consejo, de December 20, 1994, relativa a los envases y residuos de envases. Diario Oficial de las Comunidades Europeas. View source (https://eur-lex.europa.eu/eli/dir/1994/62/2018-07-04)
- Reglamento (UE) 2025/40 del Parlamento Europeo y del Consejo, de December 19, 2024, relativo a los envases y residuos de envases, por el que se modifican el Reglamento (UE) 2019/1020 y la Directiva (UE) 2019/904 y se deroga la Directiva 94/62/CE. Diario Oficial de la Unión Europea, serie L, January 22, 2025. View source (https://eur-lex.europa.eu/eli/reg/2025/40/oj)

Last reviewed: October 30, 2026

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