

# A Plastic Clamshell Packaging Alternative that is Consumer Friendly, Cost Efficient, and Theft Resistant? It's Finally Here.

By Chris Nippert

**W**ith an alarming rate of consumer injuries associated with opening rigid plastic clamshell packaging and growing price instability in the plastics industry, there is an urgent need for a new alternative to the traditional plastic clamshell package.

Plastic clamshells, while offering outstanding theft resistance and product display attributes, have long been criticized for being extremely difficult for consumers to open. Many manufacturers have attempted to solve this problem by designing easy-opening elements into the package. Unfortunately, by doing this, the theft-resistant attributes of the clamshell were lost, causing a dramatic increase in shrinkage.

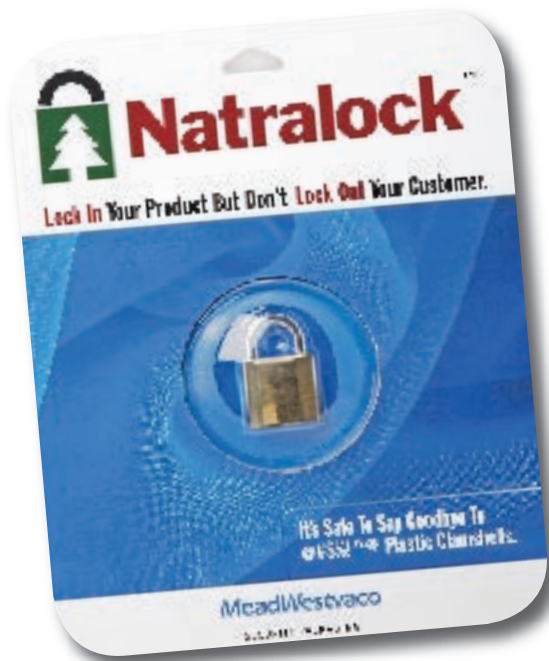
Unwilling to accept this tradeoff, most companies stuck with or went back to the original packaging. Now, however, with statistics showing that hard-to-open clamshells are causing a large number of consumer injuries, and with plastics costs rising due to the steady increase in oil and natural gas prices, the issue with plastic clamshells has become much more serious.

Manufacturers are faced with the very real prospect that by continuing to use these clamshells, it could cause long-term damage to their brand reputation and also affect their bottom line. As a result, the question has become *not whether to change* the packaging, but *how to do so* without compromising theft protection.

Understanding these complicated issues, MeadWestvaco has developed the perfect solution—introducing Natralock™. With a core component made from tear-resistant paperboard, along with a much smaller plastic display bubble, Natralock offers the safe-to-open attributes consumers want, with the product display benefits of 100 percent plastic clamshells, while maintaining the theft resistance critical to loss prevention. And because paperboard is far less reliant on the cost of oil and natural gas, Natralock provides far superior price stability.

## The Assault on the Customer—“Wrap Rage”

To deter theft, today's plastic clamshell packaging is of course designed to be difficult to open. The problem is this packaging is as difficult to open for the customer as it is for the thief. Many times, standard kitchen scissors aren't enough to cut around the curved perimeter I-beam used to give the package added support. Frustrated, consumers end up using sharp tools such as box cutters and knives in order to open their purchase.



This situation, along with the resulting sharp plastic edges, is leading to an alarming number of consumer injuries. According to *CBC Marketplace* and the U.S. Centers for Disease Control, an estimated 300,000 people visit the hospital annually as a result of lacerations incurred while trying to open plastic packaging, making it the fifth most common cause of non-fatal injury.

This issue, dubbed “wrap rage,” has caught the attention of the media, and a number of TV and radio shows, including CBS's *The Early Show* (March 2005), *Regis and Kelly* (March 2006), and *NPR* (May 2006), have started running features calling for a better alternative.

## High Fossil Fuel Prices and the Effect on the Price Stability of the Plastic Clamshell

100 percent plastic clamshells are deeply impacted by the price of fossil fuels. As much as 60 percent of the cost to make the clamshell is dependent on oil or natural gas. As the price for oil has increased, so has the cost of clamshells. Since 2001, the cost of crude has risen 160 percent. During this same time, the cost of PVC and PET, the most common plastic resins used to make clamshells, has risen 90 and 35 percent respectively. As a result of these steady increases, plastic clamshell pricing has become extremely unstable.

## How Natralock's Unique Attributes Provides the Perfect Solution

**Safer to Open.** Natralock's core material paperboard is naturally stiff, eliminating the need for a ridged perimeter I-beam commonly used with plastic clamshells. And unlike plastic, when cut the paperboard leaves a safe, smooth edge. While extremely difficult to tear open in the store, Natralock can be safely cut open at home with standard kitchen scissors.

**Superior Price Stability.** Being made primarily of paperboard, Natralock's manufacturing process is less than 5 percent dependent on oil. And in comparison to plastic, which have seen prices rise an average 50 to 100 percent since 2001, the price of Natralock's paperboard has risen just 6 percent. As a result, Natralock's pricing is more dependable.

**Outstanding Theft Resistance Comparable to PVC Plastic Clamshells.** Natralock is made of two sheets of tear-resistant paperboard, polymer coated for added tear strength, and heat sealed together around a concentrated plastic display bubble using a unique pre-applied heat sealant. The result is a package that has an extremely tight seal and is nearly impossible to tear apart by hand. For the plastic display bubble, a "bubble double" two-layer plastic design can also be used, protecting this area from being opened with a knife.

## Additional Natralock Advantages

**Unmatched Billboard Presentation.** Natralock packaging offers unmatched billboard presentation, which provides multiple benefits:

- **Much Larger Printing Area**—With a larger flat surface, Natralock gives you far greater space for advertising and product information, as well as for larger print, making your message really stand out on crowded shelves.
- **Outstanding Graphics**—Natralock's paperboard is made with a

clay coating, giving it brighter colors and sharper images.

- **Glare-Free Surface**—By eliminating the need for plastic covering the billboard, there is no plastic glare to obscure the readability of your package.

**Kinder to the Environment.** Natralock also solves the needs of companies pursuing environmental sustainability initiatives:

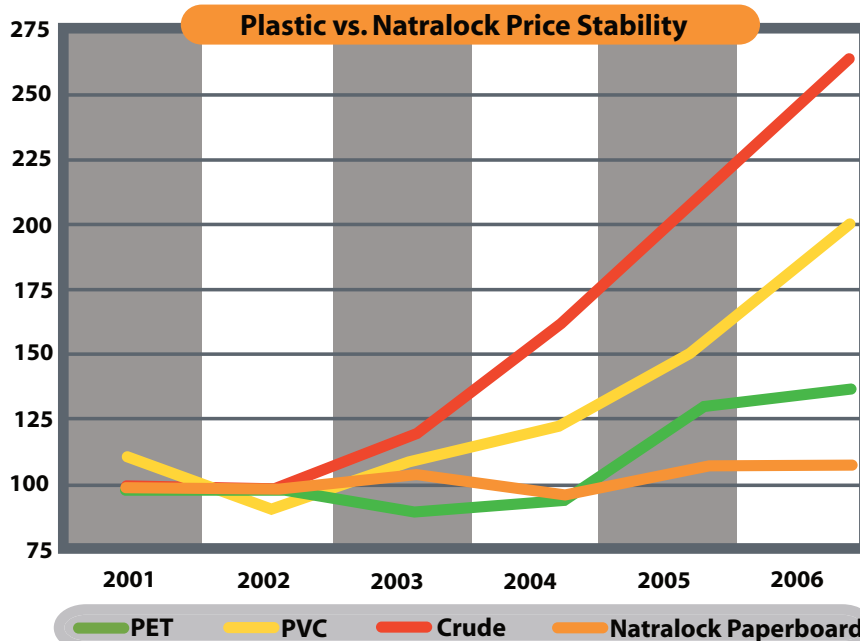
- **Excellent Recyclability**—In contrast to plastic clamshells, which are not recyclable in current recycling programs, the paperboard component of Natralock is recyclable by 57 percent of U.S. households. Consumers with access to paperboard recycling programs can remove the plastic display bubble from the package and recycle the paperboard. The small plastic bubble is not recyclable, but we are working on developing a recoverable alternative.
- **Use of Recycled Content**—With the inclusion of a packaging stiffener, Natralock contains 40 to 45 percent recycled content.
- **Dedication to Continued Sustainability Efforts**—As a founding member of the Sustainable Packaging Coalition, MeadWestvaco is a leader in sustainability efforts. Natralock is ranked "Best in Class" in the packaging segment of the Dow Jones Sustainability Index and certified by the Sustainable Forestry Initiative.

## Minimal Costs to Switch

Natralock can utilize existing thermoforming machinery, thereby requiring little additional capital costs, making the switchover from the plastic clamshell quick and easy.

With Natralock's extensive benefits, the public push for a plastic clamshell alternative now means retailers do not have to cut back on theft resistance.

To learn more about Natralock's security packaging solutions, visit us today at [www.natralock.com](http://www.natralock.com) or contact us at 804-327-6331.



### Sources:

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