RESOURCE LABEL GROUP

SHRINK SLEEVES DEMYSTIFIED: A GUIDE TO ENHANCING PRODUCT PACKAGING

Would you like your labels to:

- Have more space for branding
- Be easier to recycle
- Have security measures built in
- Be highly durable and waterproof
- Simulate different container colors so you can reduce your packaging spend
- Be best-on-shelf

You can get all of these features and more with shrink sleeve labels. In this document, we'll answer common questions about this type of packaging and explain why it could be ideal for your next labeling project.

WHAT ARE SHRINK SLEEVES?

Shrink sleeves are made of film and are seamed into a tube. The sleeve is then applied over part, or all, of a product and heated until it conforms to the container like a second skin.

What Kinds of Products Can I Use Shrink Sleeves On?

Shrink sleeves are a popular option for a variety of product categories:

- Specialty Foods
- Sports Nutrition
- Functional Beverage
- Wine Spirits and Beer
- Dietary Supplements
- Pharmaceuticals
- Health and Personal Care
- Household Chemical (including spray bottles)

While food and beverage products account for the majority of shrink sleeves, they're becoming increasingly common in other brand-centric industries.

Why Are Other Brands Switching to Shrink Sleeves? Why Should I?

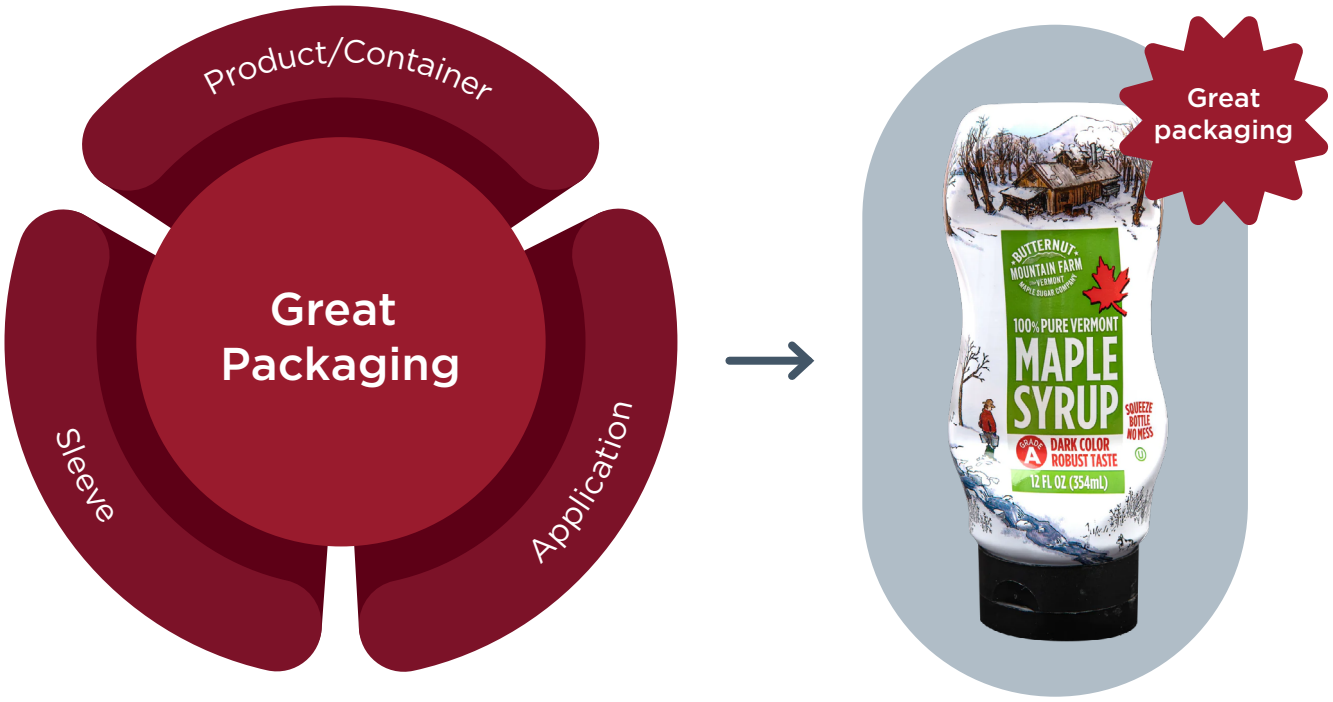
Because shrink sleeves often can cover the entire container, you get much more space to work with. Many brands love having 360 degrees of real estate for branding or displaying directions — especially in multiple languages.

Can I Use Shrink Sleeves if My Product is Subject to Regulation?

Yes. In fact, shrink sleeves can be great for these types of products because there's more room to print required information such as warnings or multilingual directions. And if you're required to use tamper-evident packaging, you can build tamper bands right into the sleeve for a seamless look and easier removal when the consumer opens it.

How Do I Pick the Right Type of Sleeve for My Product?

Your label partner can help you choose the right sleeve material and other design factors based on your product's container and the way the sleeve will be applied to it. The sleeve, product container and application are equally important and must be properly balanced to get a good outcome.



Do I Have to Use a Certain Type of Container?

No. Shrink sleeves let you be more creative with your container selection because you're no longer locked into having a necessary flat space to adhere a traditional label. If your competition is using traditional labels, you can gain a competitive edge by using shrink sleeves with eye-catching graphics to make your product stand out on the shelf.

How Durable Are Shrink Sleeves?

Very. Shrink sleeves protect your branding during transport and shelving because your graphics are most often going to be printed on the inside of the sleeve, protecting them from abrasion. They're also waterproof, making them ideal for use in humid or moist environments.

Are Shrink Sleeves Hard to Apply? Can I Do It Myself?

Sleeve application is both an art and a skill. The process requires specialty equipment for the application and for the shrinkage. In inexperienced hands, even the best-designed and engineered shrink sleeve can end up looking distorted and sloppy.

Because so much depends on the quality of the application equipment and the skill of the operator, it would be beneficial to work with a co-manufacturer that is experienced with shrink sleeves.

Resource Label Group can advise you on which questions to ask when shopping for vendors or consult with your chosen applicator company.

If Shrink Sleeves Use More Material, Doesn't That Make Them More Expensive?

Many factors can impact the cost comparison to pressure sensitive labels. For example, covering all of the container might allow you to purchase just one color of your container by using shrink sleeves to simulate other colors (for example, different shades for shampoo and conditioner bottles). This method cuts down on the pigments needed and often can greatly reduce the costs indirectly.

Plus, with shrink sleeves, you can build tamper bands right in instead of applying them separately, as you would with traditional labels. This consolidation creates less pieces of packaging which reduces the number of touch points for you or your co-manufacturer, saving time and labor and, usually, dollars.

Isn't More Plastic Bad for the Environment?

Though they may not look like it, shrink sleeves can be more sustainable than other types of labels. While recycling a pressure-sensitive label involves pulling off the label — which may or may not come off in one piece — it's possible to make a shrink sleeve that doesn't have to be removed at all. For many container types, sleeves are a great counterpart for sustainability.

This option takes the onus off the consumer to remove the label and increases your sustainable credentials. However, it also requires the shrink sleeve films and inks to be carefully selected to match your container and its parts. Bring your label partner into the design process as early as possible to avoid this issue.

For some projects, shrink sleeves can also be made with a zipper, or vertical perforation, running down the side so they can be fully removed before recycling the container.

Does My Label Have to Cover the Entire Container?

No. While full body sleeves are the most common, you can also opt for partial coverage, such as a tamper evidence seal.

Shiny, Plastic Sleeves Could Make My Product Look Less Premium. What Are My Design Options?

You can actually use many of the same embellishments you'd use on regular labels, including:

- Varnishes (satin, matte, soft touch, sandpaper)
- Cold foil (can be used to create metallic effects)
- Doming/high build (tactile shapes)

Resource Label Group's experts can advise you where to place them for maximum effectiveness.

Can I Do Small Press Runs with Shrink Sleeves?

Yes. Shrink sleeves are compatible with digital printing, which is more cost-effective for smaller runs. Digital printing also makes it easier to manage multiple SKUs. Digitally printed shrink sleeves can be embellished offline with a separate finishing process.

If you are planning large runs and want more embellishment options, the flexographic printing process will often be the most appropriate when it comes to quality and cost.

How Does the Design Process Work? What Do I Need to Get Started?

We cannot stress this part enough: The sooner you bring us into the shrink sleeve development process, the more value we can provide anticipating potential problems down the road.

At Resource Label Group, the shrink sleeve creation process begins with a 3D scan of your intended container, along with any other components such as spray triggers or lids. So, bring us every part of your package!

Our software predicts how the film will wrap around your product, giving you an idea of what you can expect your shrink sleeve to look like on the container.

The scan is so precise that it can detect minute differences between seemingly identical containers. It can also flag potential problems so they can be corrected before they result in costly errors.

Next, we create a blank template for your design team to work in. It indicates where the seam and fold lines will be placed.

When the design is ready on your end, we'll distort the art, tweaking it so it looks natural to the naked eye once it's wrapped around the container. We'll also check your file for possible technical issues.

Do I Need to Know How My Sleeves Are Going to Be Applied Before Getting Started?

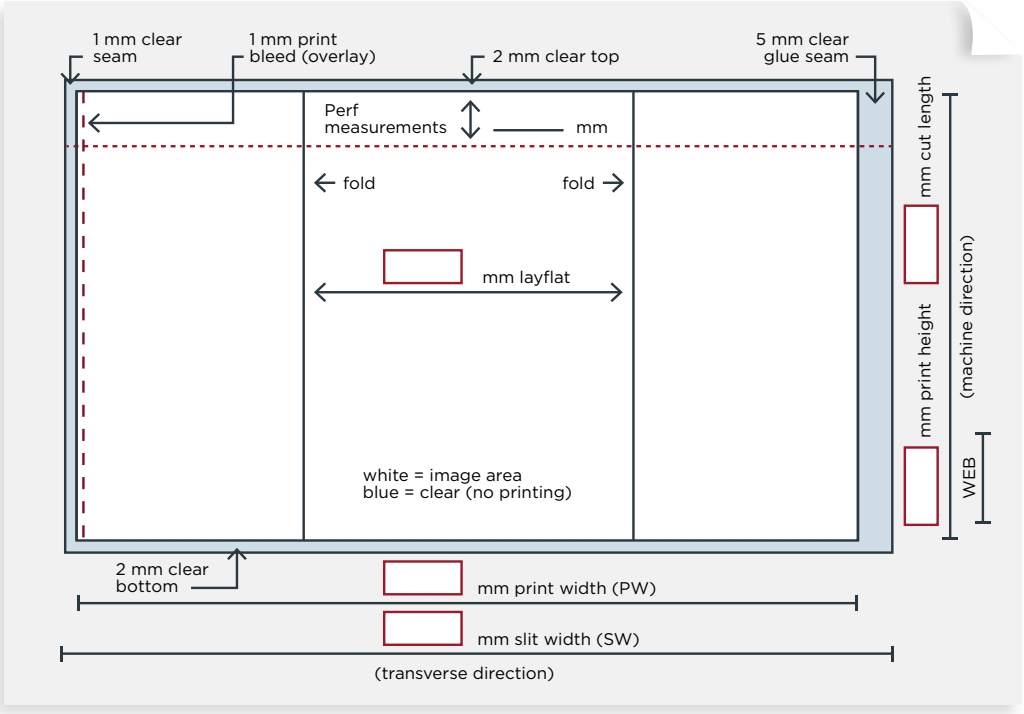
Collaboration with the co-manufacturer or applicator can be critical to a great shrink sleeve outcome. There is a lot about the application process that can affect how we develop your sleeve specifications, right down to the size and material selection. We can make some assumptions based on the container alone.

However, to get the best results, we recommend you connect us with the personnel responsible for application early in the process. When we work hand in hand with the applicator, we're able to hone in on the best and most accurate specifications.

Will My Proof Look Different Than What I'm Used To? How Do I Make Sense of It?

Shrink sleeves are unique in that they are delivered in tubular or cylindrical form, but the artwork in your proof will be flat (unseamed) and two-dimensional, as seen below.

The left and right edges of the proof below are joined together to make the seam. Your artwork will appear within the white area.



What Are Shrink Sleeves Made Of?

Today, most shrink sleeves are made of plastic polymers, such as: PET, PETG, PCR PET, OPS, PVC, PLA and more. Each film type will exhibit its own unique shrink properties and determining which offering is best for a project can be weighed by many factors.

Resource Label Group can advise you on the best film selection in pursuit of your project goals.

Once I Approve My Shrink Sleeve Proof, How Is It Actually Printed?

First, we need to know how the sleeves will be applied to your containers. Will it be done by hand, like in the case of prototypes, uniquely shaped containers or niche products? You'll need individually cut labels. If you're using applicator machinery, you'll need your shrink sleeves delivered in roll form.

The sleeves are then printed with the graphics on the inside of the film. If any embellishments are needed, they're made before the roll goes through the slitting and seaming processes.

We can provide the finished sleeves to you or your co-manufacturer exactly how you need them for hassle-free application.

Many film types

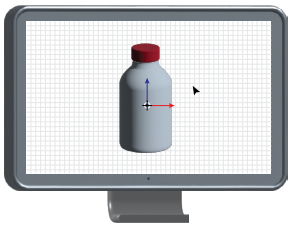
How a Shrink Sleeve Gets Made

STEP 1

Resource Label Group performs a 3D scan of your intended container, including any lids, spray triggers, etc. so you can see what your sleeve might look like.

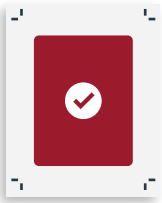
STEP 2

We provide a template for your design team to work in, showing them where components like the seam will go.



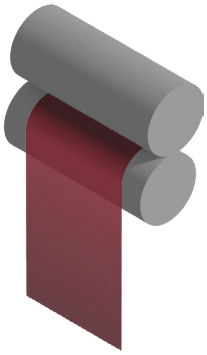
STEP 3

After receiving your completed art file, we distort the art using 3D software so that all visual elements will appear naturally to the naked eye once on a curved surface.



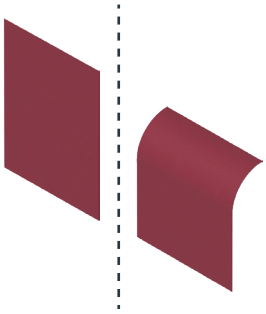
STEP 4

We will provide PDF proofs for approval for any final considerations.



STEP 5

The sleeve is printed on the film using either flexographic or digital presses, according to your needs. Any finishing touches such as varnishes are added offline.



STEP 6

After printing, the sleeve is cut (slit) and the ends are glued together (seamed) before we ship them to you or your applicator.

STEP 7

We ship the sleeves to you or your chosen co-manufacturer in a refrigerated truck to keep them from shrinking any further before they're applied to your product.

STEP 8

Once at the site of application the sleeve, now in cylinder form, is dropped over the container.

STEP 9

The container and sleeve enter the heating tunnel where the film shrinks to hug the contours of your container.

STEP 10

After cooling, the sleeved containers are ready for palletizing and shipping.

What Do You Mean by Slitting and Seaming?

Keep in mind, the shrink sleeves are printed on rolls. The ends are joined to make a cylinder before the sleeve can be applied to the container. That's where slitting and seaming come in.

Slitting cuts the unprinted sleeve waste off the roll. However, it needs to be done precisely to make a high quality seam. Poor slitting can result in weak solvent bond or result in a rough feel and appearance.

Seaming is the process that joins the two ends together, binding them together with solvent. When done properly, you can hardly tell where the sleeve begins and ends.

When Does the Actual Shrinking Happen?

Shrinking occurs during the application process. This process is usually carried out by a co-manufacturer or other third party with the required skill and equipment to yield the best results.

There are three types of heat sources: steam, radiant and hybrid. Filtered misted steam is the ideal heat source for almost all projects. Your Resource Label Group representative will work with the application team to create the best outcome.

How Do You Ensure Consistent Quality?

Our experts know what to look for when testing shrink sleeves. There are regular checks throughout the print run to verify color consistency, ink adhesion, seam integrity and more.

A bad sleeve doesn't just ruin one product. Some problems, such as seam failure or web breakage, can result in lost time and money due to starting and stopping the application and packaging line.

What Do I Need to Know About Transporting and Storing Shrink Sleeves?

Since shrink sleeves are reactive to temperature, it is best to ship them in refrigerated trucks to protect the material and keep it from shrinking earlier than planned.

Once in your care, you need to store your shrink sleeves in a temperature-controlled space, preferably around 70°F and 50% relative humidity. To keep the sleeves from shrinking in storage, be very mindful of the temp but also keep the film out of direct sunlight.

Do Shrink Sleeves Have a Shelf Life?

They do. It can vary by film products, but the typical supplier shelf rating is for six months. Resource Label Group can help factor your volume and storage situations when helping you select which film to use.

We can also leverage our network's buying power to keep your preferred film in stock regardless of season and demand. We can also store and manage your art files across production lines so that we can swing into action when you need your next batch of shrink sleeves.

My Shrink Sleeve Project Might Be Complicated. Can You Handle That?

Yes! At Resource Label Group, we welcome these kinds of challenges. Our team of experts loves blending creative and technical details to craft innovative solutions for our clients.

Resource Label Group — Your Experienced Shrink Sleeve Provider

Resource Label Group provides the services, solutions and reach you'd expect from a national company, with the dedication and touch of a local partner to create labels — and impressions — that last.

We are committed to thrilling our customers through innovation and quality solutions that continue to produce world class and award winning packaging solutions our customers expect.

I'm Ready to Get Started. What Happens Next?

To get the process started, request a quote or call us at 1.888.526.8177.

SHRINK SLEEVE GLOSSARY

Learning about these terms will help you better understand your shrink sleeve and help you check the proof before signing off on it.

Coefficient of friction: The film's ability to slide against the surface of the container. The higher the COF, the harder it will be to slide over tight areas. When dealing with shrink sleeves, there are two types to consider. The first is static, which is the force required for the film to begin moving over the container. The second is kinetic, or the force required to keep the film moving. The internal COF of the sleeve is an important consideration when using high-speed application equipment.

Cut length: The total height of the finished sleeve.

Distortion: The effect the shrinking process has on the sleeve's artwork. It's offset by pre-distorting the artwork during prepress.

Fold line: The two areas of fold on a flat finished and seamed shrink sleeve.

Layflat: The width of a flat finished shrink sleeve, from one-fold line to the other. Double the layflat measurement and you get the internal circumference of the sleeve.

Print height: Height dimension of the live print area. Generally, this is 4 mm less than the cut height. We leave 2 mm of clear film at the top and bottom of each finished sleeve so the applicator can detect the start and stop points when cutting the film.

Seam: The point at which the ends of the sleeve overlap.

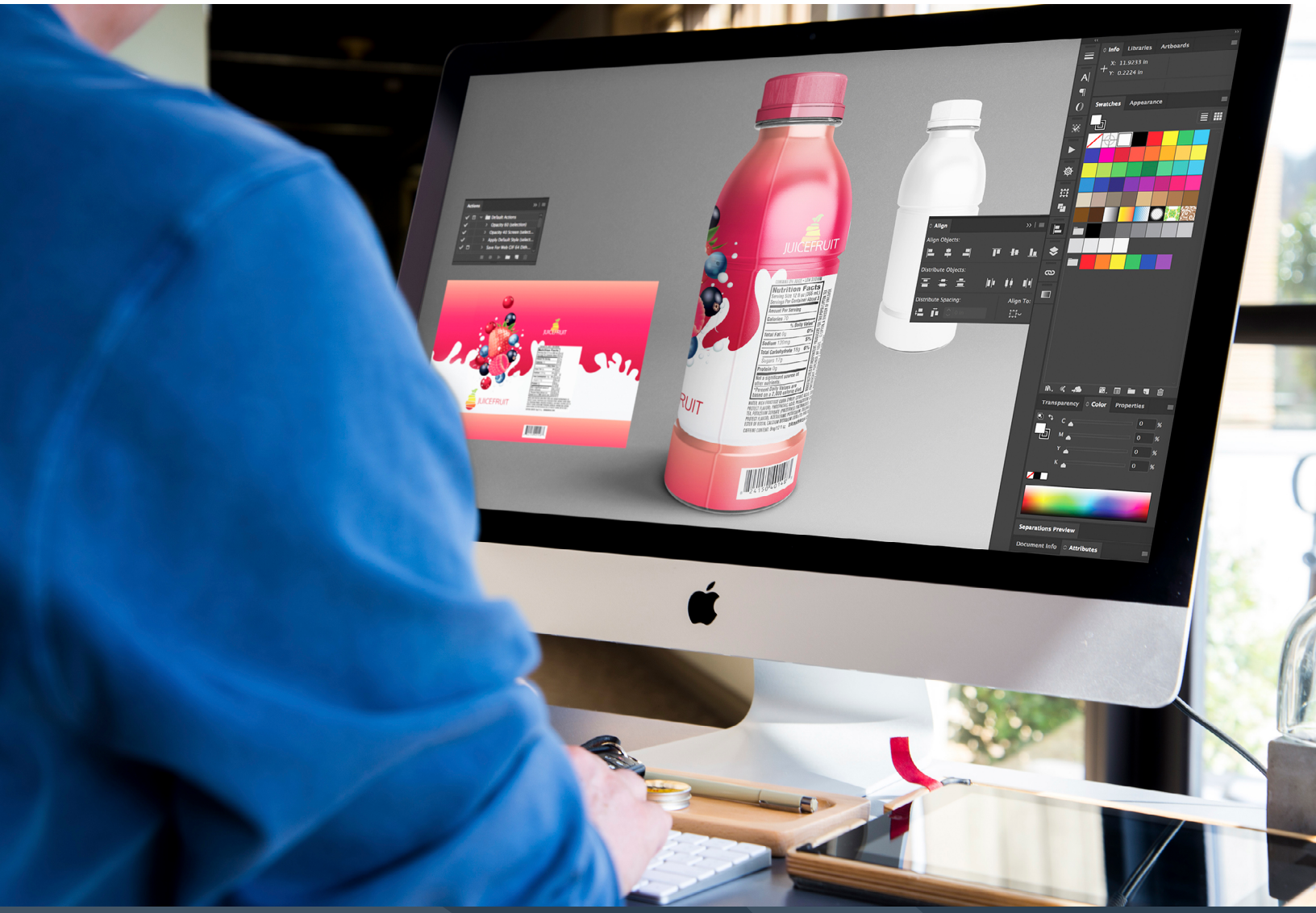
Slip agent: An ink additive used to reduce the film's coefficient of friction, often applied in the last layer of printed white ink.

Slit width: The total width of the sleeve before seaming.

Teeth per inch: The connections remaining on a perforation. This ratio determines the tear properties of the perforation.

Transverse direction (TD): The direction of edge to edge or left to right. This is where the sleeve has the highest shrink potential.

Machine direction (MD): The direction in which the film unwinds as it's fed into the press. Machine direction is oriented end-to-end.

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