European Pallet Association e.V. (EPAL)

PRESS ARTICLE

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EPAL CP pallets – the new industry standard in chemical logistics

Chemical pallets, or CP pallets for short, have been an important part of logistics in the chemical and pharmaceutical industries since 1991, i.e. for 35 years. Previously, there were a variety of pallet formats with different dimensions and qualities in the chemical industry. Some experts estimate that up to 2,500 different pallet types were in use in the chemical industry prior to 1991.

Standard pallets such as EPAL Euro pallets or EPAL industrial pallets are also used in the chemical industry. However, due to the special dimensions of containers for the transport and storage of chemical products such as drums, bagged goods, big bags and octabins, there is a need for additional pallet formats. Chemical pallets must also have a high load-bearing capacity, as particularly heavy goods are often transported. Resistance to toxic and corrosive substances is another requirement for chemical pallets.

The lack of standardisation in the quality and load-bearing capacity of pallets in the chemical industry in the past has led to problems in the transport of dangerous goods, and the lack of standardisation in the dimensions of chemical pallets has impaired the effectiveness of logistics processes.

In order to meet the special requirements for pallets in the chemical industry and at the same time enable the reuse of chemical pallets, two chemical industry associations developed nine formats of chemical pallets in the early 1990s, which are now known as CP pallets (CP1-CP9). The German Chemical Industry Association (VCI) and the European Association of Plastics Manufacturers (APME), in collaboration with numerous pallet manufacturers, defined the technical specifications for CP1-CP9 pallets and also established rules for the production and repair of CP pallets.

CP pallets are exclusively wooden pallets. There are two different types: skid pallets (CP1-CP5) and particularly stable frame pallets (CP6-CP9). A total of five formats are available, including three formats that are particularly well suited for transport in sea containers due to their dimensions of 1,140 mm x 1,140 mm and are therefore often referred to as CP container pallets (CP3, CP8 and CP9). Since the first production of standardised CP pallets in 1991, they have become the industry standard in the chemical and pharmaceutical industries.

However, problems have also emerged in recent years. In its CP specification, the APME association expressly points out that it accepts no responsibility for the quality and use of CP pallets beyond standardisation. This means that APME and VCI do not provide any quality assurance or organise the reuse of CP pallets.

The European railways faced a similar problem more than 60 years ago after introducing the Euro pallet as the standard pallet for rail transport in 1961. At that time, the railways quickly recognised that only constant quality assurance of

Euro pallets could guarantee their quality and reusability and thus their problem-free use in rail logistics. From the mid-1960s onwards, this task was taken over by the predecessor organisations of EPAL and, from 1991, by EPAL itself.

The lack of comparable quality assurance and reuse organisation for CP pallets has meant that, in practice, CP pallets have often no longer met uniform quality standards over the last 20 years. Instead, quality-related specifications have been agreed individually between buyers and manufacturers of the new pallets. This has made reuse more difficult and necessitated costly safety checks by companies in the chemical industry.

The European Pallet Association e.V. (EPAL) responded to these problems with the use of CP pallets back in 2018 and introduced quality-assured EPAL CP pallets, which comply with the APME specifications for CP pallets. However, EPAL CP pallets are subject to continuous and independent quality assurance in terms of production and repair. At the same time, EPAL has also integrated EPAL CP pallets into the open EPAL pallet pool and supports users in the use and exchange of EPAL CP pallets.

By transferring the successful model of the EPAL Euro pallet and the EPAL pallet pool to the CP pallet sector, EPAL has attracted the interest of the chemical industry. In 2025, several large chemical companies began cooperating with EPAL. From 2026, BASF and Covestro will primarily use EPAL CP pallets in Europe and Asia, and other chemical companies such as Lanxess are interested in following suit. In addition to the aspect of chemical logistics safety, there are two key reasons for this: the automation and digitalisation of logistics processes and new legal requirements for the use of reusable pallets.

The automation and digitalisation of logistics processes is of central importance for chemical logistics. Increasing the efficiency of logistics processes and the shortage of skilled workers in logistics are important drivers for this development and will continue to be decisive in the coming years.

However, the automation and digitalisation of logistics processes place high demands on the standardised dimensions of CP pallets. Even deviations of a few millimetres in the external dimensions or entry height of pallets can interrupt the automated transport or storage of loaded CP pallets. Such disruptions to automated logistics are associated with costs and problems that can be avoided by using quality-assured CP pallets.

On 11 February 2025, the EU Packaging Regulation (PPWR – Packaging and Packaging Waste Regulation) came into force. Among other things, it stipulates that from 2030 onwards, at least 40% of transport packaging must be reusable. For transport between companies belonging to the same enterprise and for transport within an EU member state, the reuse target is even 100%. This also affects CP pallets, as pallets are transport packaging.

However, pallets and other packaging are only considered reusable if, among other things, they are part of a reuse system that meets the requirements of the PPWR.

However, no such reuse system exists for conventional CP pallets. In contrast, EPAL CP pallets are part of the EPAL pallet pool, which meets the PPWR requirements for an open reuse system. By using and exchanging EPAL CP pallets, companies in the chemical industry can therefore meet the reuse targets for transport packaging regulated by the PPWR.

CP pallets are of central importance for chemical logistics.

Quality-assured and reusable EPAL CP pallets are the next stage in the development of CP pallets, which were invented 35 years ago, and combine the requirements of automated and digitalised logistics processes with current legal requirements for the reusability of packaging. EPAL will organise the further development of pallet logistics in the chemical industry together with companies and associations in the chemical industry. The next project is the serialisation of EPAL CP pallets with individual QR codes to enable the tracking of deliveries, which is particularly important in the chemical industry.

(Author: European Pallet Association (EPAL) e. V., 20 February 2026)

About EPAL:
The European Pallet Association e.V. (EPAL), founded in 1991, is an international non-profit association and organises the open EPAL pallet pool. More than 1,700 EPAL licensees produce and repair EPAL Euro pallets and other EPAL load carriers. Currently, more than 675 million EPAL Euro pallets and around 20 million EPAL box pallets are in circulation, which makes the EPAL pallet pool the largest open pallet exchange pool in the world.
With its principles of reusing, exchanging, repairing and recycling pallets, the open EPAL pallet pool has been a prime example of a sustainable circular economy for more than six decades. EPAL wooden Euro pallets make a significant contribution to climate protection. They store CO_2, avoid waste, reduce the need for wood and thus improve the carbon footprint of users in industry, trade and logistics. EPAL Euro pallets are the backbone of the supply chains of industry, trade and logistics in Europe.