



Samsonite and Aarova close the product life cycle of travel suitcases together

09 February 2025, 13:15

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A circular solution for old suitcases

What do you do with a suitcase that can no longer be repaired? For Samsonite, the answer is clear: closing the material loop. Together with the social enterprise Aarova, Samsonite developed a solution to dismantle old suitcases and reuse their materials. A unique story of circularity, local collaboration, and social impact.

Sustainable design and production at Samsonite



Samsonite aims to transform the luggage industry into a more sustainable sector. First, with R&D and production in Oudenaarde, the company focuses on quality and ensuring that its suitcases last as long as possible.

Additionally, Samsonite uses specially developed plastic made from PMD waste, manufactures linings from recycled PET bottles, and the Belgian repair center restores suitcases from seven European countries. Moreover, since 2023, the Belgian luggage manufacturer has had a solution for irreparable hard-shell suitcases.

The process of recycling and reuse

“When we completely dismantle the suitcases, we obtain polypropylene shells. These can be perfectly recycled and processed into new suitcases,” says Pauline Koslowski, VP of research, innovation & development at Samsonite. “But to achieve this closed-loop system, a precise dismantling of the suitcases is required. No lock, handle, screw, or wheel should be left attached.”

A local social enterprise? Found!

Samsonite succeeded in collaborating with a German commercial company to develop a dismantling process. But the solution to scaling up? They found it just across the street.

The role of Aarova in the process

Koslowski: “A colleague pointed out the possibilities of social enterprise Aarova. Since then, their employees have been manually dismantling the suitcases. Because Aarova is also located nearby, we avoid high logistics costs. This is ideal for the 4,000 suitcases we collect annually through take-back campaigns and our repair center.”

Aarova employs 330 people who are distanced from the labor market. Piet De Paepe, commercial director of Samsonite, acknowledges the economic value but



Aarova worked with Samsonite to find ways to free hard-shell suitcases from all components such as wheels, handles, and zippers.

A challenging and safe dismantling process

“That is more complex than it seems. We are looking for a simple process in which our employees follow a structured sequence of steps. However, since Samsonite also takes in other suitcase brands, every suitcase is different.

Additionally, we want our employees to work with safe tools. A knife to remove textiles cannot just be used carelessly. By staying positive and solution-oriented, we developed a smooth process. On average, a suitcase is dismantled in 15 to 20 minutes.”

Greater impact in the future

The results of this collaboration were already evident in the Essens Limited Edition 2024. One-third of each suitcase shell was made from recycled shells, without compromising quality.

From a one-time project to a continuous circular flow

In the long run, processing the company's own recycled materials may become a continuous process if the supply of material streams becomes more stable.

For both parties, social employment is a significant gain alongside sustainability.

De Paepe: “Samsonite really wants to make a difference and sees the value of local collaboration. It would be fantastic if this could also inspire other companies. Our employees help keep jobs in Belgium and make investments in sustainable projects more affordable.”

What does the future hold?

And in the future? The impact will only grow. Koslowski explains: “This collaboration teaches our Belgian R&D team how to design new suitcases that are easier to repair and dismantle. This way, closing the material loop becomes more cost-effective.”

The Essens collection is already a good example. These suitcases now have only six screws, instead of twenty in the past. Wheels and interior fabric are easy to remove. And what does the future hold? We will continue to develop solutions to make repair and dismantling even easier.

Success factors

- Complementary expertise from the company and social enterprises helps optimize the process.
- Open communication strengthens trust.
- Local collaboration makes logistics affordable.
- Social enterprise involvement increases social impact.

Quotes

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- Piet De Paepe, commercial coordinator at Aarova

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