

Opinion: The truth about meal-kit freezer packs

By Kiera Butler, Mother Jones

People love to complain about the wastefulness of meal-kit delivery companies like Blue Apron and Hello Fresh. The baggies that hold a single scallion. The thousands of miles of shipping. The endless cardboard boxes. Those problems are annoying, but ultimately they're not environmental catastrophes: The baggies don't take up all that much landfill space, the cardboard boxes are recyclable, and it's not clear whether shipping meal kits is less efficient than transporting food to grocery stores and then to homes.

Blue Apron has a take-back program, but the company won't say whether it's actually reusing any of the freezer packs it's taking back—or simply storing them in a warehouse.

But there is a much better reason to criticize meal-kit companies—and as far as I can tell, few people are talking much about it. That's surprising, because it's actually the biggest (or heaviest, at least) thing in every meal-kit box: the freezer packs that keep the perishables fresh while they're being shipped. Blue Apron now sends out 8 million meals a month. If you figure that each box contains about three meals and two 6-pound ice packs, that's a staggering 192,000 tons of freezer-pack waste every year from Blue Apron alone.

To put that in perspective, that's the weight of nearly 100,000 cars or 2 million adult men. When I shared those numbers with Jack Macy, a senior coordinator for the San Francisco Department of the Environment's Commercial Zero Waste program, he could scarcely believe it. "That is an incredible waste," he said. The only reason he suspects he

hasn't heard about it yet from the city's trash haulers is that the freezer packs end up hidden in garbage bags.

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