

Fact Sheet

Quality Counts



www.paper.org.uk/paperchain/recycling.htm

What is Quality Recovered Paper?

'Quality recovered paper' is used paper and board which has been collected from the waste stream and can be used, without further sorting, in the paper making process to make new paper and board products. This is best achieved by segregating the used paper at the source of its production in order to minimise contamination during the recovery process.

Contaminants include:

- plastics;
- glass;
- burnt paper;
- cans and metals;
- grease, oil and dirt;
- food debris and other organic matter;
- rain and moisture;
- papers not suitable for recycling.

Why Does Quality Count?

There are four main reasons why the quality of recovered paper is important:

1. Impact on machinery

Paper machines are large, complex and expensive pieces of machinery, costing in the region of £200 million each.

Running at 40mph to 60mph, foreign material such as glass or glue can have serious implications on the wear and tear of a machine, and in some cases can cause a complete shut down. It has been estimated that a complete shut down of a paper machine can cost a company up to £60,000 per hour.



2. Impact on the customer

Using good quality recovered paper ensures that the end paper and board product is also of good quality. Paper and board made from recovered paper must match the physical, performance and visual characteristics of comparable products made from virgin fibre. A product made from contaminated paper may compromise product quality in terms of strength, print quality, food safety or visual presentation, and may not be acceptable for the end customer.

Poor quality recovered paper increases the chances of entire batches of finished paper and board being rejected by the customer that in turn may raise the production costs of the final product and impact on its competitiveness. If this were to happen too frequently, recycling would no longer be an economical option and the future of secondary reprocessing would be threatened.

3. Environmental impact

If a batch of recovered paper is deemed to be of too poor a quality, reprocessors may have no alternative but to send it back to the producer for further sorting, or send it to be landfilled or incinerated. This is especially damaging given the resource and energy required to collect and sort the material in the first place.

If poor quality material manages to get into the paper making process, it can have a negative impact on the efficiency of the machines or require increased chemical additions to overcome the problems. Both of these scenarios can lead directly to higher carbon emissions from the paper mill itself and from the chemical industry.

Whereas recycling paper stores carbon in a solid form, landfilling and incineration causes the paper to break down and releases carbon gases into the atmosphere. This has an adverse effect on our environment, and exacerbates global warming.

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In 2006, the Waste and Resource Action Programme (WRAP) produced a report, entitled Environmental Benefits of Recycling, which provided a comprehensive review of international life cycle analysis (LCA). This demonstrated the huge benefits of recycling over both incineration and landfill, concluding that the UK's current recycling of those materials (including paper and board) saves between 10 - 15 million tonnes of CO₂ equivalents each year compared to the current mix of landfill and incineration with energy recovery.



4. Economic impact

Currently, much of the poorly sorted paper recovered from the UK waste stream is exported to destinations such as India, Indonesia and China. There, labour costs are lower and reprocessors can afford to sort the batch of recovered paper by hand. However, no mill in the world can make paper from plastics, metals or glass, and this system simply creates a new waste stream outside of the UK that must still be managed in an environmentally sound manner. It is still UK waste but is no longer under the “duty of care” of the UK, and this can be seen as contrary to the overall principle of recycling.

PaperChain has doubts as to the long term sustainability of these markets. When the inevitable downturn in export market demand arises, the UK may end up with large quantities of poor quality recovered material with nowhere for it to go but landfill or incineration. This could threaten the future of the whole UK recycling infrastructure and may be a hurdle for the development of new recycled content paper and board reprocessing investment in the UK.

There is also a risk that some of this material is being shipped in breach of the EU Waste Shipment Regulations, as the quality can be so poor. This is high on the public and political agenda with the current focus on UK recycling.

How to improve the quality of your recovered paper

Contamination is particularly prevalent in single stream (co-mingled) collection schemes. This is where all recyclables—paper, glass, cans, plastic—are stored together in one box and collected, mixed, in the same vehicle. This is particularly common with newer Local Authority kerbside collection schemes.

PaperChain would advocate that single stream (co-mingled) collection schemes are avoided in favour of segregated collection systems where possible, but if they are introduced the following actions should be taken to try to keep contamination to a minimum:

- put your paper and cardboard into a carrier bag to keep it clean and free from other contaminants;
- ensure your tins and jars are both clean and dry before placing them in your recycling box;
- ensure the lid of your recycling box closes tightly before placing it outside for collection, to prevent rain and damp from penetrating the box and being absorbed by the paper;
- don't include paper or cardboard that has been in contact with contaminants, notably food, into your recycling box. This can include pizza boxes and snack wrappers;
- don't include pieces of broken glass, such as a jar that has been dropped.

PAS 105 2005

The Waste and Resources Action Programme (WRAP), together with PaperChain and other members of the secondary raw material supply chain, has developed a Publicly Available Specification (PAS) in an effort to improve recovered paper quality.



PAS 105 makes recommendations for, and gives guidance on, good practice for the collection, handling and processing of recovered paper intended for recycling within UK end markets. It is applicable to paper collected by local authorities, local authority contractors, community groups and charities from households and other sources that generate similar material to households.

It is imperative that quality is built into the process now, to ensure that the material is recovered in such a way that provides the best economic and environmental option for the entire recycling chain. Significant carbon reduction can be achieved by recycling the material instead of landfilling or incinerating it, but only if the material is of a quality that can allow efficient reprocessing.

Further information can be found at the following website: http://www.wrap.org.uk/paper_specifications

Where can I get more information?

PaperChain

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