



PAPER RECOVERY & RECYCLING

In Australia and New Zealand, 87% and 58% respectively, of the paper and paperboard consumed is recycled every year, making it one of the most recycled of all materials. The Australian and New Zealand paper value chain is committed to maximising paper recycling rates, reducing barriers that hamper the ability to recycle paper. Recycling paper is the most eco-efficient waste management option, and the use of recycled fibres complements the need for virgin wood fibre to meet societal demand for paper and board products.

Paper is one of the most recycled products.

The paper recycling process starts with you. Once you have consumed a paper product, it can be placed in the recycling bin and collected alongside other used paper products from businesses, households and offices.¹

In 2020, Australia and New Zealand recycled 87% and 58% of all paper and paperboard consumed.¹ Australia is the paper recycling champion, having the highest rate globally. It is followed by Europe (74%), North America (66%) and New Zealand (58%).² The Two Sides research shows that 69% of consumers are aware that paper and paper packaging are sustainable products and 82% know that they are recyclable.¹

Because some paper products are retained for the long-term (for example, books and archived documents) or otherwise disposed of after use (for example, sanitary products) or subsequently used for other purposes (such as insulation), the theoretical maximum recycling rate is 78%.³

Paper is recycled, on average, 7 times in Australia and New Zealand.⁴ Paper cannot be recycled indefinitely as the fibres get too short and worn out to be useful in creating a new sheet of paper. Furthermore, production cannot be based on 100% recycled fibre, as 100% of consumption cannot be collected. The cycle must therefore constantly be refilled with new strong virgin fibres from sustainably managed forests.

Paper for recycling is an essential raw material.

To maintain quality, it's important that paper is collected separately from other materials. It can then be sorted and graded to determine the end uses it will be suitable for. The recovered paper is then mixed with water so that the fibres can be recovered. During this process, contaminants are removed, the fibres cleaned and if necessary, ink is removed. The resulting pulp may then be used to produce 100% recycled paper, or mixed with virgin fibre depending on the quality characteristics required.

“ Separate collections increase the quality of Paper for Recycling, therefore all actors, even households, must recognise that they are handling a secondary raw material and not wastes. ”

European Paper Recycling Council, 2017.



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Recycling of fibre is more eco-efficient than other waste management options.

The most eco-efficient use of wood fibre for paper and paperboard is within a 'cascading system'. In a simple cascading system, fresh fibre is removed from the forest and used to make wood or paper products which are recovered after use.



The recycled fibres are reused in paper and board manufacturing until they are unsuitable, at which point they are discharged in the recycling processes and burned for energy, displacing fossil fuel with reduced carbon emissions.⁵

Most paper-based products are designed for good recyclability and gathering in suitable collection schemes, thus the fibres can be recycled and used again in paper and board manufacturing.

Recycled and virgin fibre are complementary.

Australia and New Zealand are world leader when it comes to recycling paper - 87% and 58% respectively, of paper is recycled.¹ In 1991, paper for recycling made up 40% of the fibre used, compared to 60% virgin fibre. In 2020, paper for recycling made up 56% of the fibre used, compared to 44% virgin fibre.⁴ This means more paper for recycling is being used as a raw material by Australia and New Zealand paper producers.

Sources

1. Toluna, 2021.
2. European Paper Recycling Council, Monitoring Report, 2020.
3. European Paper Recycling Council, 2020.
4. CEPI, 2018.
5. WBCSD, Fresh & Recycled Fiber Complementarity, 2017.

This growth in recycled fibres being used has slowed down in recent years as total paper for recycling in Europe reaches nearer to its practical maximum. It is therefore likely that the current balance of recycled and virgin fibres will remain with virgin fibre as both are fundamental to the paper making process.

Paper for recycling can be used in some grades more than others. For example, newsprint and some types of packaging are often made with 100% recycled fibre. However, high-grade graphic papers have a lower utilisation rate of around 13%, as some specialty papers for technical applications, cannot include large amounts of recycled fibre due to performance, safety or hygiene requirements.⁴

The paper making process is a sustainable cycle. Recycled constantly brought in to replenish and maintain the process. Recyclability is one of the key environmental benefits of cellulose fibres, together with renewability, biodegradability and the CO₂ mitigating role of sustainably managed forests.

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