

PAPER RECYCLING IN EUROPE

(extract from CEPI Editorial...)

“The origins of the European paper industry are to be found in recycling.

It was the sharp rise in the amount of industrial printing and in the volume of books, newspapers and packaging being produced in the 19th century that forced the paper industry to seek more accessible and stable sources of raw material - cellulose fibres.

The 21st century saw a strong development of recycling. In 2005, the same amount of raw materials came from recycled fibres as from virgin fibres. By 2010, when the paper industry will be meeting its commitment to reach a recycling rate of 66%, some 2,000kg of paper will be being recycled every second in Europe.

For the industry, recycling and virgin production are complementary - one could not exist without the other, at least not with production volumes in Europe at the level they are. Recycling helps keep the sourcing of virgin fibres at volumes where forests can be managed sustainably. Virgin fibres are essential in the renewal of the recycling loop but are also needed for the manufacture of certain paper grades. Both sources also help us to combat climate change. It is a daily communication challenge to ensure that our stakeholders are aware of this too.

Another challenge for the industry is to manage the quality of the recovered paper resource. As most of the good quality recovered paper resources have already been tapped, the increase in recycling comes from sources that could put both the sustainability and competitiveness of European paper recycling in jeopardy unless focused action is taken.

Separate collection of waste by municipalities, as advocated by CEPI in the review of the EU's Waste Directive, is essential to ensure the quality and availability of recovered paper. Addressing municipalities is something environmental organisations and citizens' groups can do to support and increase paper recycling. For different reasons, separate collection is equally important in eastern European countries where systems have yet to be set up and in existing paper-recycling countries in western Europe. The proactive decision by the paper industry and the recovered paper sector to come up with a European Declaration on Paper Recycling [now covering 29 European countries] in the late 1990s shows that we are going in the right direction.

Equally important has been the industry's work in introducing a European standard for recovered paper grades, the EN 643, thereby recognising recovered paper as a valuable secondary material and not as waste. This point was emphasised by the industry's consistent refusal to talk about “waste paper”.

The industry is not resting on its laurels. Further ambition towards more professionally managed recovered resources will serve both the competitiveness and the sustainability of the paper value chain. One example of such work is the design of a European identification system for recovered paper. With this identification system, the responsible sourcing guidelines and the EN 643, the concept of recovered paper will be well and truly on the map.

Work to increase knowledge about paper recycling, developing understanding of both European and global recovered paper flows, and supporting R&D in paper recycling is also ongoing.

We have come a long way since the days when the European paper industry was last so firmly based on recycling.”

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