

Recycling for Businesses



The UK paper and board industry currently recycles around 3.1 million tonnes of recovered paper (used paper) annually. In 2019 around 7.4 million tonnes of used paper and card were recovered in the UK for recycling, of which 4.3 million tonnes were exported to overseas markets.

Although the collection of domestic waste has a much higher public profile, much of the recovered paper used by the paper industry comes from commercial, industrial and retail outlets. The newsprint sector depends heavily on household paper collections, but also uses “over issued” pre-consumer materials and packaging, graphics and tissue papermaking operations rely on businesses for most of their recovered paper requirements.

Controlling business costs is a key consideration for all managers, so valorising waste is important in ameliorating cost and supporting corporate social responsibility and environmental considerations.

Graphic Papers

Office graphic papers, such as copier paper, letter head, compliment slips and computer printouts, have a number of potential further uses because these grades are generally made from chemically or semi-chemically produced fibre which has high intrinsic value. This particular resource is largely untapped because the paper needs to be segregated and held separately, which means that someone in an office has to take responsibility to ensure this is done. Special recycling bins (and shredders) for office use are readily available from a variety of outlets, including recovered paper merchants and office supply stores, making the task less onerous.

Many small businesses do not generate enough recovered paper to make collection for recycling economically viable. However, collection does become feasible if a number of businesses in the same vicinity agree to segregate their paper waste and place it in a common storage facility. The legal requirement to pre-treat all business waste destined

for landfill by sorting is met by this activity, and after consideration of increasing landfill tax costs, this should make the recovery of used office paper a sensible economic choice in the future.

Newspapers and Magazines

Around 3 million tonnes of graphic papers were consumed by publishers and the public in the UK in 2019. Of this, 900 thousand tonnes were recycled back into newspapers and magazines in the UK. Newsprint manufacturers obtain their used newspapers and magazines from local authority household collections, paper banks, and kerbside collections. They also use over-issued newspapers and magazines returned without being sold. Newsprint is a high volume, low margin commodity, and manufacturers need to be able to obtain large and steady volumes of clean recovered material to maintain their competitiveness. The UK now has two highly successful newsprint mills using only recovered fibre. They produce high quality newsprint sold to domestic print houses.

Packaging Grades

Paper and board packaging tends to get recycled into new packaging. Of the circa 4 million tonnes of used packaging recovered in 2019, 1.9 million tonnes were recycled in the UK. Much of this paper packaging waste emanated from industrial, commercial, and retail users and is described by the trade as “OCC” (Old Corrugated Containers). This demonstrates an effective closed loop system that recovers old cardboard boxes and converts them back into new boxes, often in a matter of a few days.

Mixed Papers

Mixed papers is the lowest grade of useable recovered fibre and is often the final outcome of sorting operations that separate out more valuable paper grades. It is mostly bought by packaging mills that can utilise the fibre and average down their raw material costs. Demand for mixed

papers can vary according to economic conditions and when demand is high for higher quality grades they will be bought to be sorted, usually to extract newspapers and magazines. Conversely, when demand is low, they can be hard to sell. Their use is dependent upon the availability and price of stronger, cleaner grades and so demand can be volatile and buyers fickle.

Collection of paper and board from industrial and commercial units is important

Producers of recycled graphic papers, tissue and packaging products all rely on recovered paper and board from industrial and commercial sources because these outlets generate material that is:

- generally high volume
- uniform and available in consistent quantities
- segregated
- clean
- cost effective in terms of transport utilisation

How is commercial and industrial recovered paper collected?

Recovered paper merchants handle much of the paper and board that is recycled in the UK. They can be independent operators who supply sorted material to papermills, integrated companies that are owned by a paper manufacturing organisation or increasingly waste management companies. Some will act as a middleman between local authorities or business and papermills. Often industrial and retail operations backload recyclable paper through their distribution networks, collecting and baling in their own distribution centres before selling on to waste managers, paper merchants or mill operators. The UK has a sophisticated private paper and board recovery infrastructure, which can provide a variety of services ranging from compacting and baling facilities, handling of confidential material, and the provision of tailored collection bins.

Local Authorities

Some local authorities provide commercial waste and recycling services. According to a survey by Waste and Resources Action Programme (WRAP) carried out in 2010, 65% of local authorities provide a commercial recycling service for Small to Medium Sized Enterprises (SMEs). The most common materials to be collected from businesses are card and paper with a high proportion of local authorities that provide recycling collection services picking up these materials. However, budget cuts in local government have forced a number of local authorities to review whether they are equipped to compete with major waste companies for commercial waste streams.

Some Local Authorities have direct contracts with paper mills to supply segregated recovered paper, although in

recent years these numbers have declined largely as a consequence of the outsourcing of services by local authorities and a subsequent move to comingled collection. Others may have arrangements with recovered paper merchants or waste management companies. Recovered paper and board that has been collected in the general waste stream, but not separated for recycling will either be incinerated or sent to landfill.

What paper and board can you recycle?

This will depend on the recycling services available but in general terms, the following are recyclable:

- corrugated boxes and other paper and board packaging
- office papers
- direct mail material
- printers offcuts
- converters offcuts
- newspapers and magazines

Office Papers

Almost all paper and board collected in offices can be recycled into new products, but the ease with which this can be done will depend upon how the material is collected and presented. As a general rule, recyclable materials should be segregated. Local recovered paper merchants or waste managers will be able to advise the best way to do this. 'Contraries' such as clips and staples are removed during the de-inking process, but non-paper materials and those listed in Table 2 are unacceptable and can cause damage during the papermaking process.

Non-recyclable 'contraries'



- Elastic Bands**
- Glass, metal and wood**
- Laminated paper**
- Magazine cover-mounts**
- Nylon string**
- Paper cups**
- Polythene and other plastics**
- Food wrappers**
- Sticky notes**
- Thermal fax paper**
- Wax paper**

Office collection schemes are more successful where staff are motivated to participate by clear instructions and conveniently placed, clean and tidy recycling bins.

Recycling bins should be clearly labelled to show which materials are and are not acceptable.

Why recycle?

Business waste has to be disposed of somehow and it is no longer legally or morally acceptable to send it for disposal as untreated waste. Landfill or incineration is also becoming an increasingly expensive option and businesses and local authorities should therefore be looking for the most economically efficient way to deal with recoverable paper and board. Separating paper at source provides an opportunity to valorise an important resource.

Some businesses recycle their waste to improve business practices and to lessen their environmental impact. Recycling helps the environment by re-using resources, reducing the amount of carbon released into the environment and minimizing the amount of material going to landfill. It is recognised by Government as the best practicable environmental option for dealing with used paper and board products.

Why should businesses recycle their paper?

Main drivers include:

1. Reduction of Costs

Every successful business keeps a careful eye on costs. Recycling paper is an easy way to reduce waste disposal costs and, in some instances, raise revenue from the sale of material which is no longer of use to the business. Recycling paper and board just makes good business sense.

2. UK Government and European Waste Strategies

UK Waste Management policies are informed by the EU Waste Framework Directive. This provides a number of challenging targets for the UK Government in reducing waste going to landfill and increasing the amount of packaging waste being recycled. The paper industry is proud of its performance and continues to exceed its legal requirement, consistently achieving over 70%. In early 2016 the European Commission launched a new Circular Economy package which proposes higher targets still. European paper packaging recycling targets are set to rise to 75% in 2025 and 85% in 2030 and municipal waste recycling targets from 50% in 2020 to 65% by 2030. In 2019, the UK's recycling rate for all paper was 68% and 81% for packaging paper and board.

3. Landfill Pre-treatment Requirements

Treating waste reduces the impact it has on the environment and encourages recovery and recycling.

Under the law, all waste must be treated before it is sent to landfill. It is the responsibility of all businesses to ensure their waste undergoes pre-treatment. Treatment is defined as a physical, thermal, chemical or biological process which changes the characteristics of the waste.

Waste characteristics may be changed by:

- reducing the volume of the waste
- reducing the hazardous nature of the waste
- making handling or recovery easier

4. The Landfill Directive & Landfill Tax

The Landfill Directive was introduced in 1996 and ushered in a landfill tax to discourage the landfilling of biodegradable waste. It was initially planned that landfill tax would increase by £3 per tonne per year, to a medium/long term rate of £35 per tonne. However, in the 2010 budget it was pledged to increase it by £8 per year to at least 2014. As of April 2020, Landfill tax stands at £94.15 per tonne.

5. Producer Responsibility (Packaging Waste Regulations)

Businesses with a turnover above £2m or which handle 50 tonnes of packaging are obligated to demonstrate they have contributed to the recycling of packaging waste by purchasing Packaging Recovery Notes (PRN). Obligated companies have 2 options: comply with the Regulations on an individual basis; or join a collective compliance scheme.

Whichever option is chosen, obligated companies are required to register with the Environment Agency (EA) in England and Wales, the Scottish Environment Protection Agency in Scotland (SEPA) or the Northern Ireland Environment Agency (NIEA) in Northern Ireland. These Agencies are responsible for enforcing the Regulations and all have published guidance on how businesses have to demonstrate compliance.



Collective compliance schemes are responsible for discharging their Members' obligations on their behalf. Failure to register is a criminal offence and can result in a substantial fine.

There are a number of compliance schemes in operation and details can be obtained from the EA or the Department of Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Defra). A useful guide to the Producer Responsibility (PRN) system and the way it works has been published by the EA's Advisory Committee on Packaging (ACP).

A link to it can be found here: <https://npwd.environment-agency.gov.uk/FileDownload.ashx?FileId=946cab53-a22d-4326-91e0-ccba9dcda275>

In 2019, following the launch of the Governments Resources and Waste Strategy for England, it published a number of public consultation documents aimed at reorganizing the structure of recycling and waste collections. At the core of this policy was reform of the Producer Responsibility System. Work continues within Government on this with a second round of consultations planned for early 2021 and system changes currently scheduled for implementation in 2023. One outcome of this is likely to be a sharp increase in costs for those businesses placing packaging onto the market.

How can you arrange for your recovered paper and board to be recycled?

Local recovered paper merchants, Waste Management companies or the local authority recycling officer should be contacted for details of the services they provide. These can include the provision of containers for short-term storage, wheeled waste bins, compacting equipment for companies generating substantial quantities and the handling of confidential papers. Advice will also be available on how to best organise space to facilitate collection and avoid fire risks. Be prepared to segregate your waste stream.



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