

Recycled Content in Corrugated Packaging



The papers used to produce corrugated packaging in the UK are predominantly made of fibres that have already been recycled. However, new virgin fibre will always be required by the industry to maintain strength and other properties.

Recycled Content

The established recycling systems that provide used material for paper mills can come from two sources: recycled content can be either **post-consumer** or **pre-consumer**.

Post-consumer material is paper-based packaging that has completed its task of delivering the goods that were placed in it. It is typically collected from supermarkets and local authorities before being returned to the paper mill.

Pre-consumer material is generated at the time of manufacturing the packaging. It is baled and sent back to paper mills by the corrugated converter for re-pulping and production of new paper.

Corrugated packaging contains very high levels of recycled content – an average of 75-80% of the fibre used to make new boxes, across the UK as a whole, has already been recycled. Many boxes contain 100% recycled fibre.

Maintenance of Performance – Fresh Fibre

Corrugated packaging is readily recyclable and fibres can re-enter the cycle several times, but they lose strength with each cycle. To maintain the performance of the papers, it is important that fresh fibres are added to the cycle; both pre-consumer and virgin fibre help to achieve this.

If this fresh fibre was not added, the cycle would only contain fibres with limited performance and papers would have to be made heavier to retain the same strength. The optimum use of fibres requires the incorporation of fresh fibre to maintain the strength - approximately 20-25% fresh fibre is required.

When new fibre is used, it typically comes from sustainably managed forests using softwoods such as pine and spruce, which are accredited by the Forest Stewardship Council (FSC) or the Programme for the Endorsement of Forest Certification (PEFC). This commitment to responsible forest management has made a huge contribution to the increase in size of Europe's forests.

CPI Position:

- While the UK industry uses mostly recycled fibre to produce corrugated packaging, there will always be a need for fresh, virgin fibre to maintain the performance of the packaging;
- Both recycled and virgin fibres have an important role to play in the environmentally responsible production of corrugated packaging. There is no valid basis for 'fibre discrimination', that is to say that neither type of fibre is 'better' or 'worse' than the other;
- Approximately 20-25% virgin fibre is required to maintain packaging paper performance across the UK industry. Thus the 75-80% recycled content across the UK already represents the optimum level of recycling. Moves to increase the average recycled content to higher levels are likely to be detrimental to the environment as heavier weight papers may be required;
- For these reasons we ask that customers seeking the optimum environmental credentials for their packaging should recognise that it is not always possible to offer everybody a box made of 100% recycled content.

Further Information

Further information is available from Andy Barnetson, Director of Packaging Affairs, email abarnetson@paper.org.uk.

Confederation of Paper Industries

- The Confederation of Paper Industries (CPI) is the leading trade association representing the UK's Paper-based Industries, comprising paper and board manufacturers and converters, corrugated packaging producers, makers of soft tissue papers, and collectors of paper for recycling.
- CPI represents an industry with an aggregate annual turnover of £11.5 billion, 56,000 direct employees, which supports a further 93,000 jobs in the wider economy.
- For facts on the UK's Paper-based Industries please visit: www.paper.org.uk.

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