

CARDBOARD AND PAPER

Around 430 000 tonnes of paper and cardboard waste is dumped into landfill in the Sydney region alone every year (Resource NSW). Although some international companies sell 100% recycled paper, most Australian paper is produced from a mixture of wood pulp and waste paper content. Pulping is carried out either mechanically or chemically.

Mechanical pulping uses up large amounts of energy but has a yield of 95% of the wood turned to pulp. As a woody tissue called lignin turns the pulp paper yellow soon after production, this product is usually made into short-term use paper such as newspapers. Chemical pulping breaks down the lignin using chemicals, producing stronger fibres. However, only around 50% of the pulp can be used.

The act of recycling degrades paper fibres, so the paper is usually down-graded. For example, old newspapers are not recycled to produce high quality printing paper, but are used as newsprint and tissue instead. However, better quality fibres added to the recycled pulp can improve the quality of the product.

Making paper from waste paper usually requires no chemical treatment. Waste paper is mixed with water to form a thick soup of fibres and then moves through a screening system removing contaminants like paper clips. In order to remove ink from the waste paper, detergent is mixed in to the 'soup'. Ink attaches to the clay particles from the paper, which is then blown to the surface. The detergent, clay and ink mixture can then be skimmed from the surface and used as a soil conditioner.

Recycling paper benefits the environment and the economy in a number of ways. Compared with using virgin wood pulp, making recycled paper uses half the amount of energy and water, creating less pollution. Less recyclable materials are dumped in landfill, companies have less disposal costs and fewer trees are cut down to provide raw materials. According to Ecocycle Victoria, one tonne of recycled paper can save approximately 17 trees destined for pulping!

WHAT CAN I DO?

- Avoid using paper where practical. For example, using ceramic mugs instead of paper ones, sending emails instead of letters and putting a 'no junk mail' sign on your letterbox.
- Reuse paper printed on one side as notepads, or shredded paper as packaging instead of plastic. Reuse cardboard boxes, for example when shopping or for storage.
- Recycle as much paper as possible, ensuring minimal contamination as it can lead to the recycling load being denied and ending up in landfill anyway.
- Support recycled paper and cardboard efforts by purchasing these products

MORE INFORMATION

- www.acfonline.org.au/uploads/res_paper_book.pdf Offers information on the paper industry and recycled paper. It includes the most environmentally friendly brands of paper to purchase.
- www.wasteservice.nsw.gov.au/dir138/publish.nsf/Content/education_kids_facts_paper_cardboard Has an informative fact sheet on cardboard and paper recycling
- www.wrapp.nsw.gov.au/factsheets/index.shtml Read up about office paper and recycled content paper.