



International Council of Forest and Paper Associations

Paper Recycling

Recovering paper for recycling is an important way to source raw material for new wood fibre-based products. Paper recycling uses a biodegradable and renewable resource that sequesters carbon and helps reduce greenhouse gas emissions and makes many contributions to the circular economy. Benefits of paper recycling include economic, environmental and social characteristics. Globally, paper recovery for recycling has reached 59.3%¹. In some regions, recovery rates range from 70-75%, which is likely the practical maximum recycling rate. Some paper products cannot be recovered for recycling because they are kept for long periods of time (books) or archived (records); others are destroyed or contaminated when used (e.g. cigarette papers, tissue and hygienic paper).

Additionally, declines in consumption and production of some readily recycled paper, such as newsprint, creates challenges for paper recovery systems that have long-relied on these materials.

Recycled paper manufacturing requires a constant infusion of fresh fibre to maintain overall fibre flow and product characteristics. ICFPA members support sustainable forest management practices for fresh fibre and certifications to ensure that customers have confidence in the sustainable sourcing of raw material, which along with paper recycling can mitigate land use pressure. Paper fibre can be recycled between five and seven times for use in a variety of new paper products, but not in all applications. Some products require larger amounts of fresh fibre. Reuse of fibre for new paper products, while the fibre remains strong, is preferable to burning recovered paper for energy because paper manufacturing supports more high-wage jobs than alternative uses², provides a strong tax base in many communities and supplies important and needed products to society. New opportunities may emerge from the use of paper fibre in new non-paper bio-based applications.

ICFPA members support public policies that rely on market fundamentals and respect supply and demand as the major force for collection and reuse of paper, thus resulting in valuable raw material diversion from landfills. Recovered fibre markets are complex, efficient, and dynamic and are not served by regulations or prescriptive approaches to specify the use of recycled fibres or dictate what type of recovered fibre is used in products.

¹ 2017 global paper recycling rate, RISI Annual Review of Global Pulp and Paper Statistics.

² "Jobs Creation in PPI and Energy Alternative in the United States", RISI, 2010



ICFPA members call on governments to:

1. Educate citizens about the importance of recycling and provide consistent rules of law so that contracts between waste collectors and buyers will be respected and certain.
2. Avoid artificial mandates or subsidies that direct the flow of recovered fibre to a specific product or make distinctions between type of recovered fibre used in manufacturing (e.g. pre- and post-consumer content). The marketplace is more efficient than governments in determining the highest and best use of the recovered fibre.
3. Only support burning recovered fibre for waste-to-energy and/or disposal when they are not practical for recovery or no longer capable of being used in new product.
4. Encourage separation at the source from other recyclable materials and separate from wet or organic solid waste to reduce the cost of sorting and help ensure a high-quality stream of recovered fibre.
5. Recovered fibre is a globally traded commodity. While each country has its own standards for quality and classification, some international standard may be needed to reduce trade barriers and ensure consistent quality from one region to another for international commerce.
6. Governments should avoid instituting regulations that unduly restrict international trade in recovered paper, do not provide sufficient time for the trade to adjust or apply more restrictive standards to imports than to domestically sourced materials.
7. Ensure functioning waste markets, including maintaining a level playing field between companies recycling waste domestically and recycling exported recovered fibre.
8. In regions without established markets for recovered fibre, government may need to take a more central role in organizing the markets and ensuring coordination with local waste management policies. However, caution should be exercised so that inefficiency is not created and markets are not stymied, including the income opportunities for many individuals and small businesses in developing economies.



9. In some regions, extended producer responsibility (EPR) systems, where brand owners take responsibility for the entire life cycle of the product including its post- life disposal, are in place. However, EPR systems should not be a preferred choice where existing markets for collection and reuse of recovered paper are established, efficient and effective.
10. EPR systems that interfere with functioning markets could do more harm than good and result in less paper being collected for recycling. In places where voluntary industry-based programs are yielding good success in reaching targets for paper recovery and diversion from landfills, government should avoid interference.
11. In places where governments have already adopted EPR systems, fees should be transparent, charged only on the basis of true cost after the deduction of all revenues from the waste generated and producers should have influence over implementation methods proportionate to their contribution to costs. Any EPR-related fees collected by governments only should be used to improve recycling. In addition, the costs of litter are a social problem that is not just the responsibility of manufacturers, but of all individuals. The responsible use of paper by everyone is good for the environment.

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