



### Sorting

Successful recycling requires clean recovered paper, so you must keep your paper free from contaminants, such as food, plastic, metal, and other trash, which make paper difficult to recycle. Contaminated paper which cannot be recycled must be composted, burned for energy, or buried in a landfill. Recycling centers usually ask that you sort your paper by *grade*, or type of paper. Your local recycling center can tell you how to sort paper for recycling in your community. To locate your nearest recycling location, search your community waste center website for terms like “recycling” or “paper waste.”

### Collection and Transportation

You may take your sorted paper to a local recycling center or recycling bin. Often, a paper stock dealer or recycling center will collect recovered paper from your home or office. Your local dealer can tell you the options available in your community. At the recycling center, the collected paper is wrapped in tight bales and transported to a paper mill, where it will be recycled into new paper.

### Storage

Paper mill workers unload the recovered paper and put it into warehouses, where it is stored until needed. The various paper grades, such as newspapers and corrugated boxes, are kept separate, because the paper mill uses different grades of recovered paper to make different types of recycled paper products. When the paper mill is ready to use the paper, forklifts move the paper from the warehouse to large conveyors.

### Re-pulping and Screening

The paper moves by conveyor to a big vat called a *pulper*, which contains water and chemicals. The pulper chops the recovered paper into small pieces. Heating the mixture breaks the paper down more quickly into tiny strands of cellulose (organic plant material) called fibers. Eventually, the old paper turns into a mushy mixture called pulp. The pulp is forced through screens containing holes and slots of various shapes and sizes. The screens remove small contaminants such as bits of plastic and globs of glue. This process is called screening.

### Cleaning

Mills also clean pulp by spinning it around in large cone-shaped cylinders. Heavy contaminants like staples are thrown to the outside of the cone and fall through the bottom of the cylinder. Lighter contaminants collect in the center of the cone and are removed. This process is called cleaning.

### Deinking

Sometimes the pulp must undergo a “pulp laundering” operation called deinking (de-inking) to remove printing ink and “stickies” (sticky materials like glue residue and adhesives). Papermakers often use a combination of two deinking processes. Small particles of ink are rinsed from the pulp with water in a process called washing. Larger particles and stickies are removed with air bubbles in another process called flotation. During flotation deinking, pulp is fed into a large vat called a flotation cell, where air and soap like chemicals called surfactants are injected into the pulp. The surfactants cause ink and stickies to loosen from the pulp and stick to the air bubbles as they float to the top of the mixture. The inky air bubbles create foam or froth which is removed from the top, leaving the clean pulp behind.

## Refining, Bleaching and Color Stripping

During refining, the pulp is beaten to make the recycled fibers swell, making them ideal for papermaking. If the pulp contains any large bundles of fibers, refining separates them into individual fibers. If the recovered paper is colored, color stripping chemicals remove the dyes from the paper. If white recycled paper is being made, the pulp may need to be bleached with hydrogen peroxide, chlorine dioxide, or oxygen to make it whiter and brighter. If brown recycled paper is being made, such as that used for industrial paper towels, the pulp does not need to be bleached.

## Papermaking

The clean pulp is ready to be made into paper. The recycled fiber can be used alone, or blended with new wood fiber (called virgin fiber) to give it extra strength or smoothness. The pulp is mixed with water and chemicals to make it 99.5% water. This watery pulp mixture enters the *head box*, a giant metal box at the beginning of the paper machine, and then is sprayed in a continuous wide jet onto a huge flat wire screen which is moving very quickly through the paper machine. On the screen, water starts to drain from the pulp, and the recycled fibers quickly begin to bond together to form a watery sheet. The sheet moves rapidly through a series of felt-covered press rollers which squeeze out more water. The sheet, which now resembles paper, passes through a series of heated metal rollers which dry the paper. If coated paper is being made, a coating mixture can be applied near the end of the process, or in a separate process after the papermaking is completed. Coating gives paper a smooth, glossy surface for printing. Finally, the finished paper is wound into a giant roll and removed from the paper machine. One roll can be as wide as 30 feet and weigh as much as 20 tons! The roll of paper is cut into smaller rolls, or sometimes into sheets, before being shipped to a converting plant where it will be printed or made into products such as envelopes, paper bags, or boxes.

## What can be made from recovered paper?

Most recovered paper is recycled back into paper and paperboard products. With a few exceptions, recovered paper is generally recycled into a grade similar to, or of lower quality than, the grade of the original product. For example, old corrugated boxes are used to make new recycled corrugated boxes. Recovered printing and writing paper can be used to make new recycled copy paper. Recovered paper can be used in a variety of other products as well. Recycled pulp can be molded into egg cartons and fruit trays. Recovered paper can be used for fuel, ceiling and wall insulation, paint filler, and roofing. Nearly 100,000 tons of shredded paper is used each year for animal bedding. Even cat litter can be made from recovered paper!

## Sources:

[http://www.tappi.org/s\\_tappi/index.asp](http://www.tappi.org/s_tappi/index.asp) © 2007, TAPPI The leading association for the worldwide pulp, paper, packaging and converting industries.

[http://www.tappi.org/s\\_tappi/search\\_new.asp#searchresults](http://www.tappi.org/s_tappi/search_new.asp#searchresults)

How Is Paper Recycled?

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