

Q&A on the Sustainability of the Paper Industry

Negative impact on local communities

1. What is the paper industry doing to combat its negative impact on the health, well being and stability of local communities?

Far from having a negative impact, the pulp and paper industry positively contributes to increased wealth and well being in rural areas, both by contributing to forest management and via its presence in the countryside. It directly supports vital employment in rural areas (63% of industry employment is in rural areas). Indirectly, this leads to the establishment of infrastructures and services in those regions. With respect to the impact on health, there is no documented evidence of any such impact.

Reduced paper consumption

2. Doesn't the industry agree on the need for promoting a reduction in paper consumption?

Paper is a sustainable choice and if we only want to reduce paper consumption per se, the question is "what will we replace it with; plastic, aluminium, glass?". If we need to consider the most sustainable solution, from an energy efficiency point of view as well as from the sustainability of the raw material, then normally the answer is paper.

Renewable energy

3. Why doesn't the industry use only renewable energy?

The paper industry is already the biggest user and producer of renewable energy in Europe. Additionally, it has made a public commitment to increase its use even further.

- Half of energy used in paper mills is from renewable sources.
- 96% of electricity on site is produced through combined heat and power.

Use of wood/forest related

4. Will the paper industry stop the conversion of natural forest or high conservation value forests into plantations for paper fibre?

The nature and value of plantation forests are often misrepresented or misunderstood; they can be as sustainable as other managed forests and have a relevant environmental and economic role to play. Environmental NGOs themselves have recognised the value of plantation forests. The WWF has stated that:

"Well-managed and appropriately located plantations can play an important role in healthy, diverse and multi-functional forest landscapes. The plantation industry generates valuable foreign exchange earnings and employment opportunities for producer countries." (WWF Vision for Planted Forests, March 2003).

The paper industry supports the use of sustainably managed plantations.

5. What is the industry doing to reduce its reliance on virgin fibres?

In fact, wood makes up less than 50% of the fibre in our raw material mix. In addition and in opposition to what is sometimes believed, most of that wood comes from commercial thinnings, sawmill by-products, leftovers from other industries and small logs.



6. Why does the paper industry not use possible alternative fibres (agricultural ones, textile, hemp, kenaf, etc) for making paper?

Attempts have been made to substitute wood with these types of alternative fibres and some paper companies do make speciality papers, on a small scale, from them. However, they present significant environmental and logistical problems that make their use for large-scale production an unfeasible and less sustainable alternative. For example:

- They are not available in quantities that would meet society's needs in terms of (even moderate) paper consumption.
- Significant water consumption would be required in areas where water is needed for other reasons.
- The potential use of chemicals to grow these fibre sources could impact negatively on the environment.
- Huge storage capacities would be required, as a result of their seasonal harvest, to ensure continuous delivery of raw material to pulp mills. Their seasonal nature could also affect supply if there was a crop failure.

7. Couldn't you produce paper using less fibre?

First of all, 15% of the raw materials used to produce paper are non-fibre raw materials: starch, kaolin, calcium carbonate, etc. These are necessary for eco-design and other performance properties of paper.

Secondly, the industry has made progress in this area. In some products it has managed to reduce the quantity of raw material used while maintaining or even increasing the paper produced and its performance! It has developed low grammage products – especially in the packaging area – which result in a lower quantity or weight of material but provide the same or even higher technical and economic performance.

8. What action will the paper industry take to source fibre responsibly?

The European paper industry already sources fibre responsibly. The industry firmly condemns illegal logging and has implemented a Code of Conduct on legal logging. The industry also supports all credible certification systems and the percentage of certified raw material used by the industry is 55%.

Half of EU's forests are already certified and 86% of forests owned by paper companies are certified: the industry's commitment to responsible sourcing is clear.

9. Why does the paper industry not recognise FSC as the only valid certification system?

The paper industry believes certification is extremely important and as a result recognises all credible systems. An independently produced forest certification Matrix, made available by CEPI, shows that there is little difference between the various certification schemes when it comes to actual forest management, and that the main differences focus on the publicity and the participation process. This has also been confirmed by other studies. At the end of the day, you need to ask what is certification supposed to be about: forest management or marketing?

10. What will the paper industry do to stop the commercial use of genetically modified trees in Europe?

There are no commercial uses of genetically modified trees in Europe (just field tests).

11. Couldn't the industry do more to reduce distances between the sourcing of fibres and the plants and minimise transportation wherever possible?

The European paper industry already does this. The majority of wood used, almost 90%, is procured within Europe, and mostly from a limited radius around the mill, precisely because of transportation costs.

Paper recycling

12. Is the paper recycling effort stagnant or even cancelled out by increasing consumption?

In the past 7 years, the growth in the paper-recycling rate has been almost twice the growth in total paper consumption. European Paper Industries are recycling far more than any legal target requires, based on a voluntary industry commitment undertaken in 2000.

For example, in 2006 the European paper industry increased recovered paper utilisation by +4.0% (+1.9 million tonnes) but paper consumption only increased by +2.6%.



13. How does the European paper industry fare compared to other industries or regions on recycling?

The paper industry is the biggest recycler in Europe, and Europe is the global champion of paper recycling.

14. What has the paper industry done in recent years to improve recycling?

At the moment around 48% of all paper and board consumed in Europe are made of fibres recovered from used paper and board products but 66% of papers and board products consumed are collected to be recycled in Europe and outside Europe. This is only possible as a result of the significant investment by the paper industries in recycling capacity since the 1990s. In the past 15 years the paper recycling capacity in Europe has doubled.

At the same time the paper industry has made important efforts to promote good quality collection systems at local community level; to increase sorting at source and the separate collection of used paper; and to establish well functioning markets for the recovered paper.

15. If 56% is recycled, what about the other 44%?

Today 56% of the paper and board products used and consumed in Europe is recycled, that's 50 million tonnes and these volumes are increasing.

What we need to remember is that almost 19% of paper products cannot be collected or recycled for technical reasons; for example archives, hygiene papers, cigarette papers, etc. On top of that, it wouldn't be economically viable or environmentally sound to collect every piece of paper due to the heavy transportation that would be required.

There is still some room for progress, and the paper industry is pushing for this, but the paper industry is not the only player. It will require effort and cooperation from all the stakeholders in the chain, particularly municipalities, collectors and traders to increase collection and reduce landfilling.

16. Is recovered paper sourced responsibly?

CEPI actively advises related industries on best practices for responsible sourcing, to guarantee minimum waste of fibres. For example, CEPI produced a guidance document on responsible sourcing and supply that covers the whole chain of used paper recovery, from consumers to paper mills.

CEPI's work on managing the quality of recovered paper has benefits that touch on all aspects of sustainability: materials are not wasted, unnecessary transportation of unusable materials is avoided and those involved in handling the material are not exposed to health and safety risks.

17. Couldn't you do more?

In 2006, CEPI announced the ambitious target of recycling 66% of paper consumed by 2010. This objective is part of the second period of The European Declaration on Paper Recycling, which will run from 2006 to 2010. However, the paper industry has limited influence when it comes to recycling; to succeed, related industries, public authorities and the public to play their part.

For the industry

This target will mean new investments in paper recycling capacity but also for the industries that use paper, such as publishers and printers to focus more on issues such as recyclability.

For the public/authorities

Local authorities legally own paper once consumers place it for collection or disposal, the paper industry has no power here and can only advise on practices that support recycling.

