

The Myth

Only recycled paper should be used

The Fact

Virgin fibres from sustainably managed forests are needed to maintain the paper cycle



Without new fibres, from new trees, the paper cycle cannot be maintained. Recycled fibres degrade after several uses and the paper industry needs fresh fibre from responsibly managed forests to keep the renewable cycle going.

Europe is the world leader when it comes to recycling paper. 72% of our paper is now recycled. This means more recycled fibres are being used as a raw material by Europe's paper producers. In 1992, paper for recycling made up 35% of raw material, compared to 51% virgin fibre. In 2014, 46% of raw material was recycled fibre and 39% was virgin fibre.⁴

This growth in recycled fibres being used has slowed down in recent years as total paper for recycling in Europe reaches nearer to its practical maximum (see p.13). It is therefore likely that the current balance of recycled and virgin fibres will remain steady.

Some paper grades such as newsprint and packaging materials utilise up to 100% recycled fibre. However, due to high quality requirements, paper for recycling is not suitable for use in all paper grades, such as fine paper. Even though fine paper is seldom made from recycled fibres, it is itself an excellent and important source of raw material in the paper recycling process.

EURO-GRAPH, Paper and Environment Brochure

It is very difficult to directly compare recycled fibre with virgin fibre as both are fundamental to the paper making process.

Recycled paper can be used in some grades more than others. For example, newsprint is usually made with 100% recycled fibre. High grade graphical papers, however, have a lower utilisation rate, around 12%,⁴ but when recycled, inject the cycle with virgin fibres.

The paper making process really is a sustainable cycle. Recycled fibres are used as effectively as possible, whilst new fibres are constantly brought in to replenish and maintain the process.

Collecting paper for recycling, ensuring fibres remain available for remanufacture, is key to sustainability.

- When buying paper, whether recycled paper or virgin paper, ensure that it is made with wood from sustainably managed forests
- Virgin fibre grades are needed to continue the cycle
- Recycled fibres degrade after several uses

