

Facts about Paper Recycling

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Recovered Paper is a Valuable Resource: Separate Collection is Necessary

Fish bones and Jam in the Paper for Harry Potter?

Recovered Paper has to be collected separately from waste also in the future. There are always new attempts to collect more paper “co-mingled” with packaging materials. The paper mills rate this discussion as misleading: “We need cleaner recovered paper, not even more and more impurities”, says Dr. Ulrich Hoeke, Chairman of INGEDE. “Newspapers that are soiled with glass pieces and food residues are not a good resource to produce new white paper from it.”

The paper industry already has to struggle with new challenges of the recovered paper quality every day. Currently un-deinkable printing technologies as flexo newspapers from the UK or Italy end up in German paper mills. Waterbased printing inks like ink-jet inks impair the brightness – at the same time customers demand for brighter and brighter papers and for recovered fibres also in higher paper qualities. But who wants to give his child a Harry Potter book, for which the paper fibres have been fished out of a mixture with plastic yogurt cups, sardine and dog food cans, juice boxes and jam jars? Even if new sorting technologies shall facilitate an ever improving separation – contaminations as from juice or milk stick with the paper. In order to deliver better quality, recovered paper should not only be collected separately from waste. As in many other countries, also white grades (newspapers, magazines) should be separated from brown grades.

Combined Collection Increases Costs

The co-mingled collection of paper and recyclable packaging increases costs rather than saving money. Small savings on the collection side are outnumbered by high investments in complicated plants. A study of the British “WRAP” showed that the effort of a high-tech plant to separate dry, recyclable packaging waste from co-mingled collection is more than double compared to simple mechanical sorting of recovered paper from household collection*. In many places a collection of paper together with other fractions simply makes the paper useless for recycling.

To mix it and then separate it – this doesn’t make sense, neither economically nor ecologically. Not even the recycling industry who makes money separating waste, regards a

change from separate towards co-mingled collection to make sense. In the “Bonn Declaration”, several stakeholder groups including recycling companies, paper mills, cities and communities voted against a “mixed bin” and called for “intelligent collection rather than massive contamination”. In the declaration published in 2005, the signatories state that the concept of a mixed bin is “not geared to a sustainable cycle of matter, it rather encourages incineration or utilisation beyond the paper industry. They “emphatically object all efforts to challenge the successful system of paper collection by the interests of individual waste management companies”.

Recovered Paper is the Most Important Resource

Worldwide, Europe has extended its leading role in the field of paper recovery and paper recycling. More than 46 million tons have been recycled in 2004. This corresponds to a recycling rate of 53.7 per cent of the paper consumption. The collection rate has risen to 60 per cent – in Finland, Germany, Ireland, the Netherlands, Norway, Sweden and Switzerland even more than 70 per cent. But quantity does not mean quality. Out of 6.25 million tons of paper collected in Germany, about 5.5 million tons end up in special paper containers. “Decreasing this rate and increasing co-mingled collection would increase our problems with sorting and with contaminations, and it would jeopardise the production of higher paper grades”, Hoeke warns.

INGEDE is an association of leading European paper manufacturers founded in 1989. INGEDE aims at promoting utilisation of recovered graphic paper (newsprint, magazines and office paper) and improving the conditions for an extended use of recovered paper for the production of graphic and hygiene papers.

* Source: Optimising the Value of Recovered Fibre, WRAP (The Waste & Resources Action Programme) UK, November 2004, www.wrap.org

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