

Product Performance Investigation of Recycled Content Office Paper



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Prepared for



SOUTHERN SYDNEY WASTE BOARD



*Centre for
Environmental
Solutions*

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Executive Summary

Concerns about the quality and performance of recycled content products often inhibit the success of “buy recycled” efforts. These concerns need to be adequately addressed to strengthen buy recycled efforts and hence improve markets for recovered materials.

Government agencies are being encouraged to increase the use of recycled content products to help make recycling programs sustainable, and office paper is a product that is often targeted because it is so widely used. In recent years the quality of recycled paper has improved considerably, however there is reluctance from some procurement staff to change to recycled alternatives based on experience with early brands of recycled content paper that were poor quality and caused paper jams or other malfunctions in office equipment.

To help overcome the perception that recycled papers should not be used due to inferior quality, the Southern Sydney Waste Board commissioned C4ES Pty Ltd to consult with manufacturers and distributors of both recycled content office paper and office equipment with the aim to:

- Collate information on the available brands of recycled content office paper in terms of performance, recommended usage and quality testing.
- Determine if the use of recycled content office paper would have an impact on service warranties and agreements.
- Highlight associated issues that are influencing Council purchasing decisions.

Preliminary investigations found that most office equipment manufacturers are aware of the improved quality of recycled office papers and most do not object to the use of recycled paper in their equipment, providing it meets the product specifications for the particular piece of office equipment in which it will be used. Furthermore, many companies are more aware of the marketing advantage of supporting environmentally preferred practices and some now encourage the use of recycled paper.

Manufacturers and suppliers of recycled content office papers provided information on the quality and recommended use of the nine brands of recycled content paper currently available in Australia. In order to provide a non-biased overview, C4ES collated the paper characteristics and recommended use of the available brands of recycled content paper in two summary tables. The tables are intended to enable an easy comparison of the different brands of paper.

The Trade Practices Act 1974 was further reviewed to confirm that the use of recycled content office paper cannot legally be discriminated against without due cause.

It became apparent that some Councils seeking environmentally preferred products are now moving away from supporting Australian-made brands of recycled paper and are leaning toward the purchase of imported brands.

The NSW Waste Boards have an objective to reduce waste to landfill, hence encourage waste avoidance and diversion of materials from landfill through various means, such as encouraging the use of recycled content products. Purchase of imported recycled products over recycled products manufactured locally will have an impact on Waste Board objectives because it is technically importing a waste product into Australia and not supporting local markets that will absorb that material when it enters the waste stream in Australia.

There are two obvious areas of concern about the Australian-made products. That is the percentage and source of the recycled fibre used in the paper, ie. whether it is from pre- or post-consumer waste streams and the overall environmental impacts of mill operations, which include:

- Use of bleaching or whitening agents.
- The source of any new fibres used to supplement the recycled content papers or to produce other non-recycled paper products.
- Water management and recycling systems.
- Affiliations with other mills and/or plantations.
- Regard for the immediate environment and implementation of sustainable practices.

C4ES expanded the original scope of the project to address some of the additional factors that are now influencing purchasing decisions. Although many of the issues have been outlined in this document, more thorough research is required to ensure Councils are provided with adequate information and a clear understanding of the environmental implications of purchasing different brands of paper. Further research will rely on cooperation from the relevant paper mills and other key cooperators with due regard for commercially sensitive information.