

# All you need to know about recycled paper

## Why use recycled paper?

The main reason for using recycled paper is that it generates demand for waste paper as a raw material, thus reducing landfill. Various studies have shown that recycling waste paper has a lower environmental impact than other waste disposal methods.<sup>1</sup> For example, waste paper in a landfill site will break down but as it does it gives off methane, which is a powerful greenhouse gas. So, using 'recycled fibre' to make recycled products, such as revive, helps to reduce our contribution to climate change. Using recycled paper is also supported by the Government and by environmental groups, so it's a simple and sound way for environmentally responsible organisations to demonstrate their green credentials.

## Is virgin fibre better for the environment than recycled fibre?

Recycled paper fibres can only be recycled up to about five or six times before they become too short to be of use. And not all paper can be recycled – sanitary tissues are flushed away, books are treasured on the shelf and some waste paper is too contaminated to be recycled. So, the industry will always need virgin wood fibre and, with good forest management, this is a renewable, sustainable resource. But recycled fibre takes the benefits of wood as a raw material and adds to them. Using recycled fibre is not only an efficient use of resources but also means that waste paper has been diverted away from landfill sites. Plus, the production of recycled fibre pulp typically uses less energy, less water and causes less pollution than making virgin fibre pulp.<sup>2</sup>

## Does the production of recycled fibre pulp use more bleach?

No, it's a misconception that recycled fibre uses more bleach. A 'flotation' process that uses hot water, soap and air bubbles, removes most of the ink and the subsequent bleaching methods are largely the same for recycled fibre as for virgin fibre. Chlorine bleaching is no longer used in modern papermaking and mills have adopted either elemental chlorine free (ECF, which uses chlorine dioxide as an alternative to elemental chlorine) or totally chlorine free (TCF, sometimes referred to as process chlorine free in relation to recycled fibre) methods. Whatever the bleaching method, the effective treatment of wastewater is vitally important. Again, this will largely be the same whether the mill is producing virgin fibre or recycled fibre pulp.

## Isn't the energy use better for virgin fibre products?

This depends on the mill producing the pulp. Generally, the production of recycled fibre pulp uses considerably less energy than the production of virgin fibre pulp. However, this energy is likely to be produced using fossil fuels, which causes greenhouse gas emissions. Virgin fibre pulp production, on the other hand, often uses a proportion of energy produced using 'biomass' (such as wood residue, bark or black liquor) which can be considered to be carbon neutral, as it only releases the carbon that was already absorbed during the plant's growth. But reliable comparisons about energy can only be made if the facts about the specific mill's energy efficiency and energy sources are properly understood.

<sup>1</sup> Environmental Benefits of Recycling, 2006, WRAP.

<sup>2</sup> IPCC: Best Available Techniques in the Pulp & Paper Industry, 2001, European Commission.