What are the Environmental Issues?

The manufacture and disposal of paper and cardboard products can impact the environment through:

- Logging operations – many types of paper contain fibre from forest operations, both in Australia and overseas.
- Manufacturing process – paper making is very water and energy intensive. Along with the use of bleaching agents this can produce water and air pollution.
- Landfill – discarded paper and cardboard uses scarce landfill space. As paper breaks down it contributes to leachate that can contaminate groundwater, while also generating the potent greenhouse gas methane.

It can take up to 24 trees to make 1 tonne of office paper, yet every year in NSW 240,000 tonnes of high quality paper goes to landfill. (source: Know your Paper, Department of Environment and Conservation NSW)

Most councils purchase large quantities of paper and cardboard. By making sustainable choices, you can reduce your council’s impact on the environment and help support markets for more sustainable products.

Post-consumer waste paper is any paper that has been used and for which the consumer has no further use (ie, newspaper collected in kerbside collection). Pre-consumer waste is any wastepaper that has not been used, for example overruns and returns, or discards from the manufacturing process.

Recycled paper contains a certain percentage of recycled fibre. In order to comply with Australian Standards, the percentage of recycled fibre content must be listed. Recycled fibre includes fibre derived from both post-consumer and pre-consumer waste.

As a general rule, recycled paper made from post consumer waste has a higher sustainability value, as it directly diverts paper from the waste stream.

Manufacturing recycled paper saves energy and water, reduces natural resource consumption and greenhouse pollution compared to manufacturing from virgin fibre. Efficient manufacturing processes should minimise pre-consumer waste by incorporating closed loop manufacturing, and thereby avoiding discards in the first place.

There are a variety of local and imported recycled papers available in Australia, ranging from 20% – 100% recycled content. Buying recycled paper manufactured in Australia helps to “close the loop” by creating a market for waste paper collected through kerb side recycling programs.

Non wood fibre papers are also gradually becoming available. In Australia, office paper is now made from bagasse (a by-product of sugar cane) while overseas materials such as recycled cotton fibre, bamboo and rice and wheat chaff are becoming increasingly common. These products offer sustainability benefits by utilising a waste product, or in the case of bamboo, a material that grows far more quickly than wood based fibre.
Buying Recycled Paper and Cardboard

- Good quality recycled content office paper that meets the requirements of the machine in which it is used should not cause problems in office equipment. The poor quality of some recycled content paper available in the 1990s led to equipment blockages and dust problems. Today, recycled content papers are of a much higher quality, and performance problems are generally confined to lower quality papers (both recycled content and virgin).

- Any general claim that the use of recycled office paper will increase service costs, violate product warranties or that only a specific brand of paper can be used in print equipment is likely to represent a breach of the Trade Practices Act 1974.

- No office equipment manufacturer can legally discourage the use of recycled content paper if it meets the specifications for the machine in which it will be used. Contact the Australian Competition and Consumer Commission (ACCC): http://www.accc.gov.au if you would like more information.

- Some manufacturers use different definitions of terms such as ‘recycled paper’ and ‘post-consumer waste’. If in doubt, ask the supplier to confirm the precise meanings of the terms being used and/or check the Australian Standard for recycled paper AS 4082-1992.

Using Recycled Paper and Cardboard

- Adopt techniques for reducing unnecessary paper use (eg. double sided printing).

- Publicise the environmental characteristics of your paper on your reports and publications.

- Print double-sided to reduce paper consumption and save money.

- Recycle used waste office paper.

- It is advisable to conduct a trail of any new office paper to ensure your operational and quality needs are met prior to switching to a new product.

- Check the recommended uses provided by the paper supplier to confirm that the paper meets your requirements (e.g. long term archiving).

For more information see the Sustainable Choice Website: http://www.lgsa-plus.net.au/sustainablechoice
Comparing products

The most sustainable paper and cardboard will have the following features, as well as meeting all other operational requirements:

Environmental comparison:
- Product should have the highest percentage of recycled fibre possible – i.e. minimum 50% for printing and writing papers, envelopes, pads, invoice books, printing products, brochures etc. and 100% for tissues (toilet and facial), hand towels and packaging.
- Product should have the highest proportion of post consumer content possible as this helps to “close the loop” on office paper collected for recycling.
- Manufacturing process should not use bleaches containing chlorine. Totally Chlorine Free and Process Chlorine Free are preferable to Elemental Chlorine Free – this still uses chlorine compounds; it reduces but does not eliminate toxic by-products generated by using chlorine.
- If the product contains any virgin fibre it should be from a certified sustainably managed source (e.g. the Forest Stewardship Council manages a system for certifying timber and paper products that are derived from a sustainably managed forest).
- Product has the minimum packaging possible to provide required protection and is made with low environmental impact materials (e.g. recycled).
- Manufacturer demonstrates good environmental performance.

Economic comparison
- Cost of recycled content paper and cardboard is comparable or better than other paper products.

Social comparison
- Manufacturer is committed to the promotion of recycled material.
- Manufactured locally (there are a number of Australian recycled paper manufacturers).
- Manufacturer demonstrates good corporate citizenship.

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Model Tender Clauses

[Council] is committed to purchasing sustainable products and services whenever possible.

[Council] will give preference to organisations and individuals that can demonstrate their commitment to sustainability.

[Council] is committed to the purchase of products that facilitate recycling and decrease resource consumption and waste generation.

[Council] has determined that the following considerations must be met when purchasing paper and cardboard products:

Office paper and cardboard must ideally:

- Contain the highest possible percentage of recycled fibre: i.e. minimum of 50% for printing papers, envelopes, pads, invoice and statement books, printing products etc. and 100% for tissues, hand towels and packaging products.
- Contain recycled fibre from post-consumer sources: a minimum of 20% for printing papers, envelopes, pads, invoice books, printing products etc. and 50% for tissues, hand towels and packaging.
- Have any virgin fibre content obtained from sustainably managed sources.
- Be manufactured without the use of bleaches containing chlorine.
- Be manufactured using zero effluent systems wherever possible.
- Not have plastic or wax coatings.
- Use low environmental impact packaging – minimum packaging to protect product and contains recycled materials.

Ask potential suppliers to:

- Indicate the percentage by weight of the product that is made from:
  - post-consumer recycled fibre; and
  - pre-consumer recycled fibre.
- State the source of all virgin fibre. If the product contains any virgin fibre, specify whether this is obtained from a sustainably managed source (e.g. from a source certified by the Forest Stewardship Council).
  http://www.fsc.org/en/
- Specify the pulp bleaching materials used in manufacturing the product.
- Specify whether the product has plastic or wax coatings.
- List the types of packaging used in delivering the product (including bulk delivery packaging).

Detail:

- The total weight of packaging per unit of product.
- The proportion of recycled material used in packaging.
- Any loose fill material used as packaging.
- The recycling opportunities for the packaging or indicate if the supplier will take back the packaging after delivery (and what happens to it).

For more information see the Sustainable Choice Website:

http://www.lgsa-plus.net.au/sustainablechoice