

Paper Cup Recovery & Recycling Group reports Great Progress



The Paper Cup Recovery & Recycling Group was formed in 2007 with the objective of identifying ongoing sustainable routes for the recovery and subsequent recycling of paper cups and similar products. The Group is now pleased to announce significant progress in recycling trials with paper mills together with a major finding.

The Group has progressed a programme of work to investigate the options for recovering and recycling paper cups in line with current government guidelines, including The Waste Hierarchy. The Group aims to encourage the development of a national collection strategy that allows all types of paper drinking cups to be recovered from sites and to overcome the technical issues associated with various types of recycling, especially at paper mills around the UK, where the recovered cups could be recycled into products such as paper, tissue, board and packaging materials.

The Group is pleased to announce that trials are under way with several UK paper mills; initial trials have worked through unused formed material before moving to post consumer cups. Trials to date have helped to establish the logistic requirements and preparatory treatment needed in order for the recovered cups to be efficiently processed, including having the polyethylene coating (used to line the cup) removed, and the resultant fibre recycled.

During the trial process the Group has identified that to maximise the recycling potential of this high quality fibre it is critical that post consumer contamination is minimised. Contamination is the inclusion of residual food stuff and other waste, such as foil wrappers and stirrers, with the paper cups.

The Group, working with UK paper mills and waste management companies, including Save-A-Cup, has identified that a contamination of around 10% (by weight) is the maximum that is reasonably acceptable and therefore achieving below this level should become a clear target for the Group and those involved in the recovery and recycling chain.

In some recovery trials initial contamination levels have been as high as 25% (by weight). High levels of contamination can lead to rapid deterioration in the fibre quality contained in paper cups resulting in material rejection and, as a consequence, alternative disposal routes that are less desirable than recycling, at best being energy from waste recovery or worse land fill.

The key message from the Group is that it is extremely important to educate the consumer to separate as much liquid and other waste from the cups at the point of collection. As consumers become more accustomed to segregating waste the situation can only improve; indeed with education and clear instructions trial sites have been able to minimise contamination levels to an acceptable level.

While the Group's trials continue, it is recognised that paper cups, in general, need to be handled in a more responsible and sustainable way rather than going to landfill. Energy Recovery (also known as Energy from Waste or EfW) has been chosen as an interim solution and may continue to be used in certain circumstances. EfW plants convert cups, alongside other forms of waste, into heat which can be used for community heating schemes or to generate electricity to be supplied to the National Grid system, being recognised as a sustainable source of energy and reducing the amount of fossil fuels burnt.

The Save A Cup Company, a not for profit joint venture, has set up a Paper Cup recovery scheme to handle cups in this way. Save A Cup collection are also, where appropriate, to be utilised for paper mill post consumer trials.

In line with the Waste Hierarchy the group also recognises composting as a viable recycling route provided it is carried out in accordance with PAS100 specifications. While composting is considered more attractive than Energy Recovery the Group favours recycling processes that themselves create recyclable products, as opposed to 'end of life products' such as compost.

The Paper Cup Recovery and Recycling Group is currently made up of members from the vending and hospitality industry and consists of representatives from paper cup manufacturers, board manufacturers, beverage suppliers, the Save a Cup Company and vending & catering operators. Current members include: Costa Coffee, F. Bender Limited, Huhtamaki (UK), Kraft Foods UK Ltd (owners of the Kenco brand), Mars Drinks (owners of the Flavia and Klix brands), Maxabel International, Nestle (UK) Ltd, Sodexo, Solo Cup Europe, Stora Enso (UK) Ltd, The Paper Cup Company and Walki Ltd.

The Group is co-ordinated and independently advised by the Fibre Technology Association and the Group's activities have been endorsed by the **Automatic Vending Association (AVA)** and the **Foodservices Packaging Association** and the **Beverage Service Association**.

Any companies interested in joining this exciting initiative should contact:

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