

# Recycled paper content definition

## When procuring recycled paper should I specify Pre-consumer and Post-consumer content – or simply “Recycled Content”?

Unlike newsprint, tissue or brown grade, recycled paper used for publications, magazines and photocopying (also referred to as ‘Printings and Writings’) has traditionally been sub categorised as pre-consumer or post-consumer waste as follows:

Post-consumer waste (or post-consumer recovered paper) is the paper recovered from our homes and offices. (It does not include printer returns or mill broke\*). Post-consumer materials are finished products that have served their useful lives and would otherwise end up in a landfill or incinerator.

Pre-consumer waste (or pre-consumer recovered paper) includes: converting scrap (essentially scrap from all processes occurring once the paper has left the mill, e.g. printing, cutting and box making); newsstand returns and printers’ overruns; obsolete inventory from printers and other sources; and also any damaged stock. Some of this waste requires de-inking.

\*Mill broke is scrap generated in a mill prior to the completion of the papermaking process and usually used in-house. Mill broke is therefore not regarded as “genuine waste”. It has been re-used by paper makers for many years.

The terminology post-consumer waste implies it is better environmentally and that this specification drives collection of waste from office and homes. In reality this is unnecessary as the purchase of any recycled content paper drives collection and is therefore key in diverting paper from landfill. Whether the material sent to landfill originates from a printers or an office/business is fairly academic.

It is also worth noting that paper is already collected from all easily accessed, pre-consumer sources, so any increase in consumption has to come from either post-consumer sources or difficult to access pre-consumer sources.

There is no standard definition of pre-consumer and post-consumer waste and this has led to inconsistent mill and merchant terms such as ‘post industrial’. This makes it difficult to obtain a fair comparison of papers in the pre and post consumer categories.

### Understanding the terms – recycled content

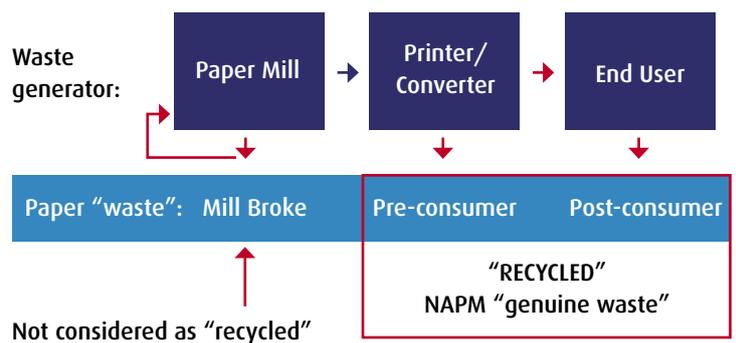
The definition of “recycled content” adopts the National Association of Paper Merchants (NAPM) description of “genuine waste”.

This is defined as: **NAPM “genuine waste”**

- converter’s waste: paper that has left the mill and is waste from a cutting or slitting operation undertaken to meet a specific commercial order;

- printer’s waste: printed or unprinted waste collected from a printing operation, which may be either ‘trimmings’ (guillotine waste), ‘overs’, ‘rejects’ or any other similar waste received direct from a printer; and
- domestic/household/office (i.e. post-consumer) waste: waste collected from any of these places, and which may be printed or unprinted.

The following diagram shows the various components and sources of genuine waste:



### Understanding the terms – waste or recovered?

In a wider recycling context, there are additional terms that are used. Over the last few decades the term “waste paper” has been replaced with “secondary fibre”, which itself has gradually been replaced with “recovered fibre”. The terms “waste fibre” and “secondary paper” are also used occasionally, and all are interchangeable. “Recovered fibre” (or paper) which is manufactured into “recycled paper” are the preferred terms.

### Conclusion

The purchase of recycled paper provides the economic incentive for collection of paper from offices/businesses thus diverting waste paper from landfill. The use of pre-consumer and post-consumer terms is an unnecessary distraction for those purchasing recycled paper. Recycled content percentage (excluding mill broke) is a simpler, clearer term and should be the one specified when procuring paper.



**70% recycled**  
Minimum 70% recovered fibre.

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