

Procurer Note: paper and Paper Products

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What does sustainability mean for paper and paper products?

The best way to improve sustainability around paper use is generally to cut down on use.

Where paper products do need to be procured, recycled paper has long been on the agenda for public sector buyers, and the Government Buying Standards set out stringent criteria for the use of recycled paper. These aim to both reduce the amount of waste paper sent to landfill or incineration, and to reduce the amount of virgin fibre needed.

All central government departments and their related organisations must ensure that they meet at least the mandatory levels for these impact areas set out in Government Buying Standards (GBS).

Paper and envelope standards follow the [UK government policy on sustainable timber procurement](#).

GBS for paper

Slightly different standards exist for different types of paper, but the principle is that recycled paper should be used as much as possible. Virgin pulp can only be used in printed publications – where specific types of paper may be required – and there are strict regulations on the proportion of virgin pulp.

As well as the paper itself, buyers should also be aware of coatings and special papers which can be harder to recycle in the future.

GBS for envelopes

Like all paper buying, recycled should be used paper wherever possible. However, many organisations use mailing systems for automated envelope stuffing. These systems can grind to a halt if the paper used does not fit precisely (for example, if it is too thick or too light), so additional allowances are made for envelopes used in mailing systems. They must still use a large proportion of recycled material, and the rest must be from sustainable sources.

Other information

These specifications were published in January 2010 following consultation. [Read the consultation.](#)

For more information on recycled paper, visit the [National Association of Paper Merchants website](#)