

Environmental Sustainability of Foodservice Products

Georgia-Pacific manufactures a number of foodservice products. These products are, and always have been, a responsible choice for their value, performance, and environmental sustainability. Our paper-based products include: plates; bowls; hot cups; cold cups; napkins; trays; carriers; and foodwrap. Our plastic-based products include: plates; bowls; cold cups; cutlery; straws; stirrers; soufflés; and all lids.

Reduce

Our products are designed to use the minimum amount of materials and still meet product performance expectations. Wherever possible, we use natural materials (such as clay and minerals) and renewable materials (such as starch and cellulose fiber) rather than petroleum-based plastics. When we must use plastics to meet performance expectations, we engineer the structure to use the absolute minimum amount and we sometimes blend minerals into the product to improve performance and further reduce the amount of plastic required.

Reuse

Our products are designed for one-time use. This allows consumers to avoid costly and time-consuming clean up. In some cases, such as hospitals and high-volume foodservice operations, our products provide an increased measure of safety since they reduce the likelihood of pathogen transfer that may be associated with inadequate cleaning procedures. We do not endorse reuse of the products. Consumers who choose to wash and reuse the products are making an individual decision based on their conditions of use.

Recycle

From a technical standpoint, all of our products can be recycled. That is, the products can be reprocessed in order to recover the materials and use them in other products. From a legal standpoint, we must say that our products are recyclable only if the customer has access to a recycler who accepts food-contaminated paper or plastic. The availability of such recyclers is limited, but is growing.

Our plastic products do not use post-consumer recycled materials because suitable, clean materials are not available in sufficient quantities and at a favorable economic position relative to virgin materials. We do recover, regrind, and recycle the clean pre-consumer materials within our plastic product manufacturing operations. Depending on the processes involved, the pre-consumer content may be as high as about 50%.

Our paper products contain a mix of virgin and recycled fibers. Most paper products contain some pre-consumer fiber that comes from recycling clean converting trim, obsolete finished goods, stub rolls, etc. within our paper product manufacturing operations. Some products also contain post-consumer fiber. For example, many of our towel products contain at least 40% post-consumer fiber, which meets the EPA Comprehensive Procurement Guidelines for post-consumer recycled fiber. Some towel products contain more than the 40% minimum level. We have many napkins, bath tissue, and wipers that meet the EPA Guidelines as well. Our Insulair ecosmart® cups contain a minimum of 12% post-consumer fiber.

Compost

At present, none of our plastic-based products are compostable. We are aware of several types of compostable plastic materials, but these do not yet meet the value and performance characteristics required for our products.

All of our paper products can be processed successfully through commercial-scale composting operations. Some of the products are coated with polyethylene to provide a moisture and grease barrier required for proper product performance. While polyethylene is not inherently compostable, processing these products through a composting operation allows the polyethylene layer to separate from the cellulose fibers. The fibers are fully compostable and the polyethylene can be screened out at the end of the composting operation. Any small amounts of polyethylene that may pass through the screening operation are inert.

Just as with recycling, the availability of composters who accept food-contaminated paper products is limited. Appropriate facilities may not exist in all areas, but if they do, we recommend that consumers contact them to see if they will accept these materials.