

South Africa's paper recycling rate tops forecast

The latest figures on the recycling of paper in South Africa indicate that the amounts recovered have exceeded the 2017 forecast by the Paper Recycling Association of South Africa (PRASA) of 63%, as the 2015 figures hit 66%, above the global average of 57.9%.



Recovered paper fibre has been used in South Africa as a raw material since 1920 and is thus a well-established waste stream. Locally and sustainably produced paper is a renewable resource with recycling featuring as a key component in the lifecycle of many paper products.

In 2001, PRASA reported a 38% paper recovery rate, rising to 59% in 2011. The association projected paper recycling rates to increase to 63% by the end of 2017 but by 2016 the paper and paper packaging industry well exceeded this with its 2015 figure of 66% of the nation's recoverable paper and cardboard being recycled into new paper products.

"The 1.2 million tonnes of recyclable paper and paper packaging diverted from landfill in 2015 equated to 1,435 Olympic-sized swimming pools," explains PRASA operations director Ursula Henneberry. This means the country is well ahead of the global average of 57.9% as reported by the International Council of Forest and Paper Association (ICFPA) in its 2015 report.

From sturdy fruit boxes and colourful cereal boxes to the classic toilet roll core and from egg boxes to milk and juice cartons, a large proportion of paper packaging is recyclable. Once recovered, the paper fibre is repulped and made into

new paper products that we use every day.

“Some paper products cannot be recovered for recycling because they are kept for long periods of time such as books or archived in the form of business and financial records; others are destroyed or contaminated when used like tissue and hygiene products.”

Promise of paper recycling

The growth in paper recovery rates is a promising trend for the country because of the environmental benefits of recycling. Recycling lessens the impact on already pressured landfill sites since the need for landfilling is avoided. One tonne of recovered paper saves three cubic metres of landfill space.

Recycling also opens up entrepreneurial opportunities for unemployed or unskilled citizens and provides dignified work for informal collectors especially if residents and businesses separate their recyclables from non-recyclable and food waste.

South Africans can definitely do more by being more disciplined with office and home recycling programmes - by using free and paid collection services or supporting school and community centres with their fundraising recycling initiatives.

“A very practical way to improve your paper recycling habits is to keep paper clean and dry, and separate from wet waste and other recyclables, and putting it on the pavement for an informal collector. This not only gives these people money in their pockets, but also gives them dignity.”

South Africa shows progress

While the country does not have the same ease of recycling for the everyday consumer that exists in developed countries, such as recycling bins in every park or on every street corner, South Africa can be proud that it ranks firmly among the developed market rates.

“Apart from industry-led programmes, South Africa’s successful paper recovery can be largely attributed to the informal collector sector,” concludes Henneberry.

Other BRICS countries, and even many developed countries, do not perform as well, such as Brazil at 47% and China at 44.7%. [An article](#) in *The Hindu Times* puts the level of recovery and utilisation of waste paper by paper mills in India at 27% of the total paper and paperboard consumed. On the top end of the scale, Australia recycles 85% of its paper and paper packaging.

PRASA is expected to release the 2016 paper recycling figures at the end of May 2017.

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