

July 2013 - Paper efficiency in UK society

Paper efficiency shrinks carbon emissions, forest impacts and pollution, and it has ethical and financial benefits too.

The European Environmental Paper Network's (EEPN) Shrink Paper project is encouraging UK society to tackle paper efficiency. It has conducted an assessment to find out how seriously some of the country's biggest paper users are taking this issue.

This document summarises the results of a representative sample of 62 large UK companies and public sector organisations. It finds that some are high-flyers, organisations that are taking advantage of the many benefits of being more efficient with their use of paper, but for many the idea of paper efficiency has yet to hatch.

Why paper efficiency matters

Paper brings great benefits to society through education, hygiene, art and literature, but we need to use it more efficiently in order to reduce its significant environmental and social costs.

Paper contributes more to climate change than most other consumer products. Its production and use emits over 8% of the world's greenhouse gases, more than global aviation. We call these emissions 'paper vapour' (see shrinkpaper.org/papervapour for our factsheet on paper's climate impact).

Increasing demand for paper not only means that these emissions will increase, but it also puts further pressure on forests and water resources. Pollution caused by its manufacture will also rise and there are likely to be further social impacts, not all of which are positive.

Being more efficient with paper use reduces pressure on the environment and saves organisational costs.

Who we assessed

The largest institutional users of paper determine how much paper is consumed in UK society. The EEPN wants to help these organisations eliminate wasteful paper use. It offers motivational seminars, mentoring, tools, reports and factsheets, and show-cases best practice on its website. It encourages organisations to commit to cutting their paper use by half, and is interested in paper use across all walks of society. In this assessment, the Shrink Paper project chose banks and utility companies, supermarkets and catalogue retailers, government bodies and universities, in order to give a broad picture of paper use across a variety of organisations.

The results

Paper efficiency is taken very seriously by some organisations, while for others its potential benefits have simply not been grasped.

The high flyers have policies to reduce wasteful paper use, they know how much they use, they are taking action to eliminate unnecessary paper use and to increase efficiency. They are also happy to talk about how much money they are saving as a result, along with all the other environmental and social benefits they bring about.

Some organisations are fully-fledged. They have paper policies in place and are making a genuine effort to increase efficiency.

A majority of the organisations surveyed are just starting to think about the issue of wasteful paper use. We have characterised these as ugly ducklings, and hope they will soon be high-flying swans!

Some organisations do not seem to want to talk to anyone about this topic at all. Many may not know how much paper they use, nor how much their wasteful use of paper is costing them and the rest of the planet. The EEPN remains positive and views these organisations as those in which the paper efficiency eggs are yet to hatch.

Sector by sector

Most of the high-flyers are government bodies or supermarkets, with *the Scottish Parliament*, *the Welsh Government*, *Highland Council*, *The Co-operative Group*, *Marks and Spencer* and *Sainsbury's* leading the field.

The highest overall achiever was the government sector and the financial sector has also performed well, with *The Co-operative Bank*, *Standard Life* and *Lloyds* making a real effort to save paper.

The EEPN did not find any universities which stood out on paper efficiency, but nor are any of them ignoring the issue completely, and in this sector *Queens University Belfast*, *Edinburgh* and *Bradford* are taking a lead on the issue.

The two worst performing sectors are catalogue retailers and utilities. Whilst some catalogue companies, notably *Argos*, *Ikea* and *Next*, are starting to reap the financial and environmental benefits of saving paper, most others have little or nothing to say about it.

Surprisingly, despite the gains to be made from online billing and the expectation that energy companies would be very conscious of their carbon footprint, the utilities sector is clearly the one which has the most work to do to tackle paper efficiency, with *Vodafone* and the *Post Office* the only companies that are showing signs of taking it seriously.

The high-flyers

All of the high-flyers are working hard and being creative in their efforts to tackle paper waste.

The Scottish Parliament is changing staff behaviour and building a culture of responsibility and resource efficiency, linking paper use to the strong commitments the Parliament has made to reduce greenhouse gas emissions.

The Co-operative Group has taken advantage of the building of a new headquarters to redesign the working environment, saving a significant amount of space through paper efficiency, and thus saving around £20 million.

Marks and Spencer has done a thorough review of all printing in the company, finding digital alternatives to paper documents wherever possible.

Sainsbury's is re-designing its own-brand packaging, with a target to half it by 2020, and by doing so it is reducing the need for trucks and saving shelf-space.

The Highland Council has developed a comprehensive system to monitor paper use across its many operations, including outsourced printing and schools. It calculates the financial and carbon costs of paper use, and has appointed a network of Green Ambassadors to encourage behaviour change.

The *Welsh Government* has reduced its internal paper use across its Administrative Estate by more than half by implementing an electronic document management system, which also saves staff time and makes information more accessible.

Together, these organisations offer role models for paper efficiency across society. The EEPN hopes many other organisations and companies will be inspired to follow their example. You can read more about these and other paper efficiency innovations on our website.

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High flyers 70-100

Banks

Co-operative	89
Standard Chartered	89
HSBC	80
Royal Bank of Scotland	74
Barclays	73
Lloyds Banking Group	63
Standard Life	63
Triodos	55
Santander	47

Government Bodies

Scottish Parliament	89
Welsh Government	74
Highland Council	71
NHS	
(the Department of Health)	64
DfID	57
GLA	55
Defra	54
Environment Agency	48
Forestry Commission	23
Northern Ireland Assembly	19.5
Brighton & Hove	
City Council	18



Preparing to take off 50-70

Supermarkets

M&S	91
Co-operative	89
Sainsbury's	85
Waitrose/John Lewis	41
Morrisons	40
Tesco	38
Aldi	33
Asda	23
Budgens	21
Iceland	18
Lidl	10

Universities

Manchester Metropolitan	76
Edinburgh	62
Queens Belfast	60
Bradford	57
Cardiff	56
Southampton	54
Nottingham Trent	50
Newcastle	44
Canterbury Christ Church	
University	35.5
Highlands and Islands	13



Just hatched 10-50

Catalogues

Argos	77
Ikea	56
Next	50
Natural Collection	44
Shop Direct	41
Boden	38
Amazon	34
Laura Ashley	19
JD Williams	16
Freemans	6
Ace	0

Utilities

Vodafone	68
Post Office	63
EDF Group	38
BT Group	37
Royal Mail	36
Scottish Power	17
EE (Orange and T-Mobile)	8
E-ON	3.5
Centrica	3.5
National Grid	3
SSE Scottish &	
Southern Electricity	3



Still waiting 0-10

Scores were calculated by adding together assessments of transparency (35%), positive paper policies (25%), actions taken to increase efficiency (20%) and measured progress in reducing paper volumes (20%).

In all cases scores were calculated using publicly available information. Many organisations also completed questionnaires and shared additional information.