

## The Impact of Paper Procurement in the NHS.

As many NHS professionals will be aware the NHS has committed to reduce its carbon footprint in line with the Climate Change Act (2008) but, aside from ensuring that legislative targets are reached, the benefits of decreasing greenhouse gas emissions are well documented. Yet the NHS faces increasing financial and service pressures; meaning that ‘green’ working is not always at the forefront of consideration.

The NHS is increasingly striving to become paperless but, as this requires a significant change in working practices, it will undoubtedly take a number of years before success is observed. This is evidenced in the volume of paper procured through NHS Supply Chain in 2016/17- approximately 3.6 million reams.

Many NHS organisations in England procure paper through the NHS Supply Chain Core Stationary list, which only contains paper produced from virgin (non-recycled) sources. As such, out of the 3.6 million reams of paper procured through NHS supply Chain, only 29,000 were produced from recycled sources:

- 100% Post-Recycled Paper – 19,000 reams
- 75% Post-Recycled Paper – 10,000 reams
- Virgin Paper – 3.571 million reams

The manufacture of the paper procured through NHS Supply Chain in 2016/17 is estimated to have produced the equivalent of 29,062 tonnes of CO<sub>2</sub>, compared to around 15,840 tonnes had all paper procured been from 100% recycled sources (table 1).

**Table 1.** *Tonnes of CO<sub>2</sub> Produced during the manufacture of paper procured through NHS Supply Chain in 2016/17, and equivalent emissions had all paper been produced from recycled sources*

	Reams of paper procured*	Tonnes CO <sub>2</sub> Produced in Manufacture	
		Paper procured through NHS Supply Chain in 2016/17	Equivalent CO <sub>2</sub> had only 100% post-recycled paper been procured
<b>Virgin Paper</b>	3.571 million	28,925	15,712
<b>75% Post-Recycled Paper</b>	10,000	53	44
<b>100% Post-Recycled Paper</b>	19,000	84	84
<b>Total Tonnes CO<sub>2</sub> Produced in Manufacture</b>		<b>29,062</b>	<b>15,840</b>

\*for the purpose of these calculations, a ‘ream’ of paper is classed as 500 sheets of white A4 paper at 80gsm.

Unfortunately, as NHS organisations are facing financial strain, the commercial argument for the procurement of virgin opposed to recycled paper outweighs the NHS’ corporate responsibility to reduce its environmental impact. Price comparisons undertaken through NHS Supply Chain indicate that recycled paper is around 215% more expensive than virgin equivalents. A key driver behind the high price of recycled paper is low customer demand; suppliers will be in a better position to reduce the price of their recycled products should more NHS organisations purchase them. Thus, the NHS and paper suppliers are in a ‘catch 22’ situation – NHS organisations will not procure recycled paper

because it is too expensive, whilst suppliers will not lower the price of recycled paper because consumption is too low.

The NHS (and those providing paper to the NHS) have a great opportunity to become exemplars for environmental protection and climate change mitigation, by reducing the quantity of virgin paper consumed. Given the proven health impacts of climate change, is it not part of the NHS' corporate and moral responsibility to collaborate with paper companies to increase the consumption of recycled, opposed to virgin, paper? At least until the NHS is in a position to become truly-paperless.

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