



Paper recyclers ramp up operations: APC in Claremont prepares to ride a wave

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Kraft means strength in German.

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CLAREMONT — The Chinese crackdown on scrap materials from the United States, including mixed paper and other recyclables, went into effect earlier this year, but North American paper mills are stepping into the gap.

“They’re jumping on the bandwagon because the market is looking good,” said Travis Gray, vice president of sales and marketing for Claremont’s APC Paper Group.

This week the Northeast Recycling Council (NERC) announced 17 increases in the capacity of North American paper mills to handle mixed paper and cardboard recyclables. The increases include paper mills that are converting, upgrading or adding machines to handle more product in Maine, Wisconsin, West Virginia, Virginia and Kentucky; new paper mills in Louisiana, Ohio and Mexico, and mills using other grades of recycled paper in Oregon and South Carolina.

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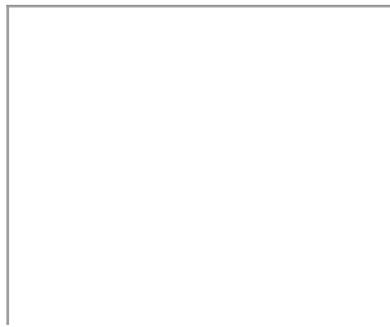
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APC Paper Group has been recycling cardboard since 1991. It has two plants: the one in Claremont, and one in northern New York.

“We were doing it when recycling wasn’t cool,” said Gray, who has worked for APC for 21 years. “Everything’s really falling into place for us — we just had to stay in business long enough.”

According to NERC, the primary source for the new capacity is old corrugated containers, which have increased exponentially with the rise of online shopping. Residential mixed paper will also be handled by at least six of the new/newly upgraded facilities. NERC’s press release notes, “More importantly, the price of mixed paper tracks that of old corrugated containers [OCC]. Increased capacity for OCC should increase the price paid for mixed paper, therefore increasing its value.”

That should be good news for municipal recycling programs, many of which are struggling to find new markets. In the Pacific Northwest, many municipal recycling programs are shutting down or sending recyclables to the landfills because they can no longer sell them to China. Claremont’s waste recycling plant learned Monday that its processor for paper and cardboard has closed temporarily, leaving the city to find another outlet.

APC primarily takes corrugated cardboard. The paper mill recycles the material into “kraft paper,” brown paper that leaves the building in jumbo rolls that are handled by a lift. Those rolls go to other factories that turn the kraft paper into fast food bags, retail bags, envelopes, and other products.

The paper mill has been in operation as a mill since the 1800s and currently employs around 50 people. Changes in public attitudes toward paper and plastic products mean the market for recycled paper is on the way up.

“I’m a bit of a tree-hugger myself,” said Gray. “This is the big trend; if you look at the plastic bag industry alone, a lot of progressive areas are putting a ban on single-use plastic bags. When McDonald’s switched from white bags to brown, that was huge.”

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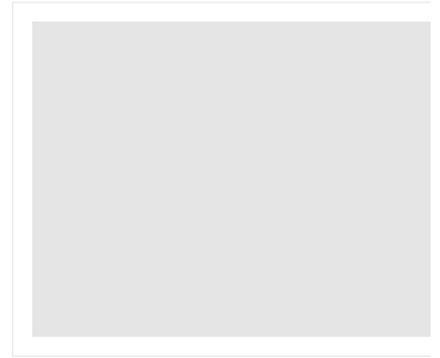
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In the past, consumers wanted paper products bleached bright white, but that is changing. Toilet paper bleached with chlorine, for example, releases dioxins, persistent environmental pollutants that contaminate soil and water. When dioxins accumulate in human or animal tissue, they can cause reproductive, developmental and immune problems as well as cancer.

School children are getting involved in the issue, organizing bans on single-use products like plastic straws. Students in Windsor, Vt., recently organized to ban plastic straws in their schools.

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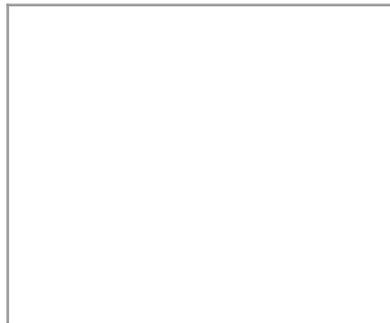
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Such efforts encourage the use of recycled-paper products, which become cheaper as they become more prevalent and as the global markets shift. The low cost of sending recyclables to China partly depended on the shipping industry: with more goods leaving China in shipping containers, freight companies looked to fill the returning containers rather than transporting them empty. It's one factor in the equation of lowering recycling costs by keeping materials in the U.S.

Most of the new facilities announced by NERC are east of the Mississippi River, and potentially good future markets for recycled paper generated in the Northeast. The data in the list comes from a variety of publicly available sources including company press releases, local news stories, the recycling trade press and presentations at recycling conferences.

“People are starting to move away from single-use toward natural products,” said Gray. “They want the real deal.”



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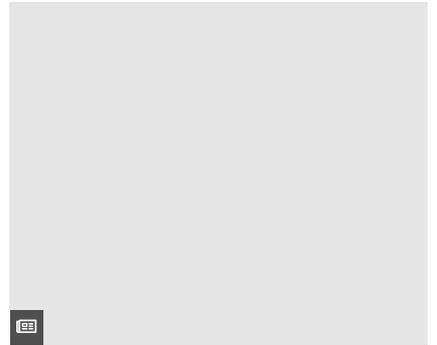
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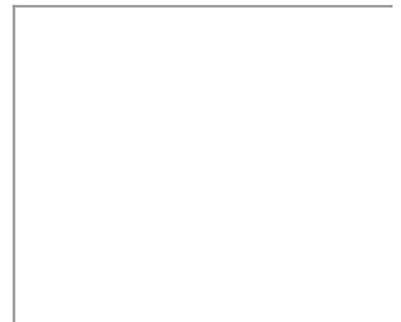


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