



PO Box 551 • Brattleboro, Vermont 05302
802.254.3636 • nerc.org • info@nerc.org

Recycled Paper Capacity Increases In North America 2017 - 2024

March 2024

North American paper mills saw twin opportunities in 2017. More goods were being sold on-line, increasing the need for boxes, and the Chinese government proposed a ban on importing recycled paper, increasing the need for domestic capacity to recycle used paper products. Their response was to launch an unprecedented expansion in North American capacity to use recycled content. In November 2018, NERC published its first list of new recycled paper content capacity projects. The list had 17 mills, of which three projects were completed. This final update includes new capacity projects at 25 mills, of which 23 have been completed.

Old corrugated containers (OCC), often called “cardboard boxes”, are the primary feedstock for this new capacity. About half of these mills also plan to use mixed paper. Several plan to consume significant amounts of residential mixed paper (RMP) which is collected at curbsides throughout the country. In addition, one facility now has the ability to recover fiber from food contaminated paper. Most new capacity increases are at mills producing linerboard and corrugated medium. Several, however, will produce recycled fiber pulp.

The list includes several new paper mills. Much of the new capacity, however, is occurring at existing mills. In some cases, a mill is converting an existing machine from making paper products such as newsprint to making packaging paper for boxes. In other cases, the mill is adding new capacity to existing machines.

The total new capacity in this report reflects the potential for more than eight million tons per year of new capacity to use OCC and mixed paper. Capacity projections are based on the paper mill running at full capacity. This can take several years as the manufacturer finds customers for its products. Existing mills that are expanding capacity have the advantage of operating permits and a customer base.

The projected increase in new capacity will not lead to a similar increase in total papermaking capacity. Closing costlier, less efficient capacity is the inevitable result of adding new capacity unless demand grows along with supply. Those facilities could use recycled or virgin fiber or both. Four of the capacity expansions on the list specifically announced that their plans included closing existing facilities that were no longer competitive. In addition, the new capacity along with declining demand for boxes led to a significant amount of “economic downtime” in 2023 and early 2024. This happens when demand is down or when energy, fiber, or other costs are rising, and the mill cannot operate profitably. Two of the facilities on this list took economic downtime in 2023. One is still closed for that reason.

Announcing a new mill does not guarantee it will be built. A new paper mill can cost hundreds of millions of dollars to site, permit, and build. Even a new machine at an existing mill can be quite expensive. Half a dozen announced projects were dropped from this list because they were not financially feasible.

Sources include company press releases, local or national newspaper articles, Resource Recycling Magazine, Paperstock Reports, Recycling Today, Scrap Magazine, Waste 360, Waste Dive, the American Paper and Forest Association, and the Fibre Box Association.

Each facility is listed by name, location, whether new or converted, projected final production capacity in either tons per year (TPY), metric tonnes per year (MTPY) or tons per day (TPD) depending on the source, raw material feedstock, and projected opening. Data is often incomplete because the individual companies determine what information they will release. This list has been updated periodically as projects are completed or new capacity is announced. However, with only one new mill scheduled to open this year and one in 2026, this will be our final report.

If you have any questions about facilities on this list, please contact Chaz Miller, Chair of NERC-NEWMOA Regional Recycling Markets Committee, at chazmiller9@gmail.com or 301-346-6507.

Completed

Midwest Paper Group

- Combined Locks, Wisconsin
- Conversion of coated paper to packaging
- 400,000 TPY
- OCC, double-lined pre-consumer kraft and mixed paper
- 2018

Packaging Corporation of America

- DeRidder, Louisiana
- Conversion of newsprint to linerboard and corrugated medium
- 150,000 TPY
- OCC
- 2018

Hood Container

- St. Francisville, Louisiana
- "New recycling plant"
- 120,000 TPY
- OCC
- 2018

Copamex

- Anahuac, Mexico
- Convert existing graphic paper to recycled containerboard
- 220,000 TPY
- OCC, RMP
- 2019

Pratt Industries

- Wapakoneta, Ohio
- New
- 360,000 MPTY recycled corrugated packaging
- OCC, RMP, double-lined kraft
- 2019

Bio Pappel/McKinley Paper Co

- Port Angeles, Washington
- Closed graphic paper mill
- 250,000 TPY containerboard
- OCC, mixed paper
- 2020

Port Townsend Paper

- Port Townsend, Washington
- Existing mill makes 325,000 tons per year of kraft linerboard, corrugated medium, kraft converting paper and kraft pulp
- Expanding OCC capacity from 400 to 750 TPD
- 2020

International Paper

- Riverdale, Alabama
- Conversion to linerboard and containerboard using some OCC
- 450,000 TPY
- OCC
- 2020

Packaging Corporation of America

- Wallula, Washington
- Conversion of fine paper to linerboard
- 350,000 TPY
- OCC
- 2020

Green Bay Packaging

- Green Bay, Wisconsin
- New mill replacing smaller existing mill
- 685,000 TPY containerboard
- OCC, RMP
- 2021

Georgia Pacific Juno Technology

- Toledo, Oregon
- New
- 300 TPD containerboard
- Extract fiber from waste generated at restaurants, airports, sports arenas, schools, etc.
- 2021

Grupo Gondi

- Monterey, Mexico
- New containerboard capacity
- 441,000 TPY
- OCC
- 2021

Nine Dragons

- Fairmont, West Virginia
- New mill to increase production capacity to 220,000 TPY and ship recycled pulp to China
- Existing mill uses sorted office paper, newsprint, and other grades
- OCC
- 2020

Nine Dragons

- Biron, Wisconsin
- Convert existing machine to produce corrugated medium and linerboard 250,000+ TPY
linerboard and corrugated medium
- OCC
- 2020 existing machine converted to recycled linerboard and corrugated medium

Nine Dragons

- Old Town, Maine
- Convert existing machine to produce 200 TPD/70,000 TPY unbleached recycled pulp
- OCC
- 2021 (note: economic downturn began in April 2023)

Graphics Paper, Inc.

- Kalamazoo, Michigan
- New facility to make 500,000 TPY of coated recycled paperboard. Note: this facility displaces an equal amount of capacity that will be closed at other facilities.
- OCC
- January 2022

Norpac

- Longview, Washington
- Converting existing production capacity to now make linerboard, corrugated medium, bags and specialty Kraft papers
- 400,000 TPY OCC and mixed paper
- Oct 2022

Sonoco

- Hartsville South Carolina
- Conversion to 100 percent uncoated recycled paperboard from 50 percent virgin and 50 percent recycled fibers used to make corrugated medium
- OCC and mixed paper
- 180,000 TPY
- October 2022

Domtar

- Kingsport, Tennessee
- Conversion of existing printed paper mill to packaging grades
- 600,000 TPY of recycled-content linerboard and corrugated medium
- 660,000 TPY of OCC (70%) and mixed paper (30%)
- Jan 2023

Atlantic Packaging Products

- Whitby, Ontario
- New machine to make 400,000 MTPY corrugated medium and linerboard
- OCC and RMP
- March 2023

Cascades

- Hanover, Virginia
- Convert closed recycled newsprint mill to recycled lightweight linerboard and corrugated medium
- 400,000 MTPY
- OCC, RMP
- May 2023

Nine Dragons

- Biron, Wisconsin
- New 400,000 TPY recycled pulp line primarily for export to China
- May 2023

Pratt

- Henderson, KY
- New facility
- 450,000 TPY recycled corrugated packaging
- Approximately 500,000 TPY mixed paper and OCC
- October 2023

2024

Total Fiber Recovery

- Chesapeake, Virginia
- New mill
- 203,000 MTPY dry recycled pulp
- 231,000 MTPY: RMP/OCC
- First quarter 2024

2026

Graphics Packaging

- Waco, TX
- New facility producing 550,000 tons of coated recycled paperboard
- The facility replaces 350,000 tons of capacity from three smaller mills that will be closed while also adding 200,000 tons of new capacity
- OCC and mixed paper along with all internally generated secondary fiber
- First quarter 2026