

## European Tissue Symposium (ETS)

# Sustainability in the Tissue Paper Value Chain

Sustainability is usually described as having three pillars: environmental, social and economic. Organisations that embrace sustainable business practices are committed to ensuring that the way they use resources today will not have any negative impact on the welfare of future generations.

For the European Tissue Symposium (ETS), sustainability is a way of life. As an industry that relies on forests for its base material, ETS has always had to think long-term. Trees have a growing cycle of up to 50 years,

and ETS members have long recognised that sustainability needs to lie at the very heart of their businesses.

ETS is committed to driving sustainable practices throughout the sector and believe, that by making progress in every area of our operations, ETS can deliver benefits to all its stakeholders. Members promote these efforts through a wide range of partnership initiatives, including a suppliers sustainability award to encourage the supply chain to embrace sustainability and national actions in support of initiatives from key environmental non-profit organisations.

The tissue paper industry is one of the leaders in sustainability initiatives, and this article explains how the following elements add up to an impressive sustainability record:

- Promoting sustainable forests
- Spearheading sustainable hygiene
- Taking the lead in paper recycling
- Focusing on energy reduction and reuse
- Reducing the use of water and programmes for water reuse
- Supporting social sustainability
- Ensuring economic sustainability goes hand-in-hand with social and environmental sustainability

This comprehensive list is backed up by a deep belief in sustainability principles among ETS and its members, who are committed to continuous sustainability improvement across the tissue paper supply chain. It is interesting to take a look at each one and then see how these efforts are tied back to principles advanced in 'The Sustainability Edge', a book offering actionable ideas for businesses wishing to advance their own sustainability initiatives.

### Taking the lead in Environmental Sustainability

ETS members work towards the goal of leaving the smallest possible footprint. Too much of what humans produce on our planet is made from non-renewable materials which once used are gone forever. Fortunately, the tissue industry is different. The raw material is trees, and by thinking long term, ETS can ensure that they regrow and regenerate to provide a sustainable resource for our planet.

Trees play a crucial role in the earth's eco-system, and paper boasts exceptional environmental credentials: it is natural, biodegradable, recyclable, comes from a renew-



able resource and is produced in a sustainable manner. Trees capture and store billions of tonnes of carbon dioxide and they provide the earth with much needed pure, breathable oxygen.

The tissue paper industry looks right across its business to support a sustainable future, and a key principle to achieve that goal is partnership and working alongside others to promote the ethical and responsible management of the supply chain. The industry works continuously to increase its sustainability across a host of different areas including recycling, transport, water and workplace safety. Many of our members have developed a code of ethics by which they operate and all are committed to supporting the sustainable management of forests based on responsible forest management, social responsibility and economic viability.

*Promoting sustainable forests*

The industry practices sustainable forest management to safeguard supplies for future generations. ETS supports Forest Certification as a way of documenting sustainable forest management. Third-party certification is one of the best ways to ensure that suppliers meet these requirements, and ETS supports the various national and international Forest Certification programmes that offer third-party verification or certification of compliance. Certification lends credibility to the industry and its members. It offers reassurance to both customers and consumers and has been widely welcomed. The certification of fibres underlines the industry's commitment to responsible forest management and sourcing. Half of Europe's forests are already certified and 82% of forests owned by paper companies are certified.

In Europe, the paper industry also supports a Legal Logging Code of Conduct which firmly condemns illegal logging. In addition, the EU Timber Regulation, which came into force in 2013, has served to uphold industry standards. It ensures that only products from legally sourced wood are sold in the EU28 – something to which ETS members have been committed for many years. About 11% of the timber felled in the world is used to make paper, and in Europe 83% of paper mills are certified by an environmental management system.

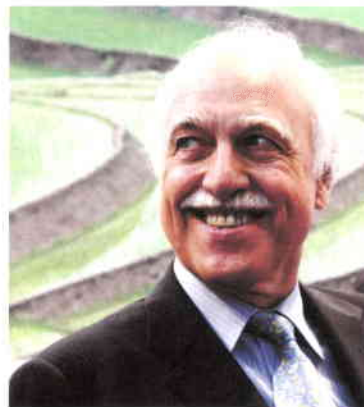
It is important that these facts are explained to consumers so they can be confident that the products they buy uphold these standards. That is why many ETS member products carry globally recognised stamps, including the FSC and PEFC labels as well as the EU ecolabel.

*A world leader in paper recycling*

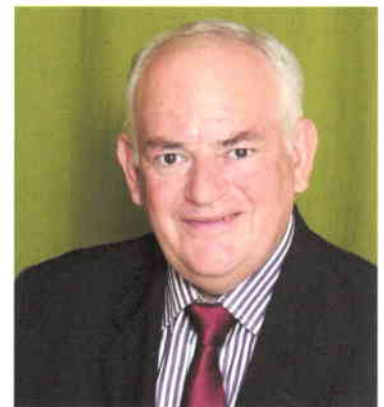
Recycling plays an important role in the sustainability of the paper cycle. The reuse of processed raw materials cuts down on the consumption of energy and wood fibres, and minimises the need for waste water treatment. Some 50% of all tissue paper produced comes from recycling and the rate is rising every year.

The cellulose fibre in wood, which is the fundamental raw material for paper making, is a natural, renewable resource. It deteriorates with every recycling process, however, and can be reused between four and eight times on average. When fibres can no longer be used, they can be converted into energy.

ETS is member of the European Paper Recycling Council and is committed to meeting the EU voluntary recycling targets, which are the highest in the world. Lifecycle analysis (LCA) studies show that sustainable tissue products can be produced with both recovered and new fibres, and that neither is considered environmentally preferable when it comes to carbon emissions.<sup>1</sup> Sophisticated new technologies mean that the tissue industry increasingly uses recycled fibres in its products without compromising on softness, strength and absorbency. Companies are innovating by using recycled fibres that are very close in characteristics to virgin fibres.



Roberto Berardi, Chairman ETS



Fanis Papakostas, Vice Chairman ETS

*Leading in energy reduction and reuse*

ETS' industry motto is 'doing more with less'; and this means producing paper using fewer materials, less energy, less water and with more efficient machines and production processes.

It also means reusing more materials, which also cuts down on energy consumption, wood fibre use and waste water treatment. The paper industry has significantly reduced its environmental impact over the past 10 years – despite the fact that paper production has steadily increased. Emissions of CO<sub>2</sub> per tonne of paper produced have decreased by 42% since 1990. Indeed today, 54% of the energy used in European paper mills is renewable, and therefore carbon neutral.<sup>2</sup> The European paper industry is also the largest user of cogeneration – a system that simultaneously produces electrical and thermal energy for industrial consumption. It is a practice that is highly efficient and saves primary energy while also reducing emissions. Currently, 94% of the industry's on-site electricity is produced through co-generation.<sup>3</sup>

ETS and its members are working continuously to optimise production processes to save resources and energy.

The paper industry has considerably reduced its energy requirements over the past decade. It is proud to be the largest, single user and producer of bio-energy in Europe, with more than 55% of the energy used by the industry coming from bio-energy.

The European Council has recognised wood products as climate friendly. Forests are the prime absorber of CO<sub>2</sub> from the atmosphere, and since young trees absorb carbon more efficiently than mature trees, ETS needs a constantly renewing source of young, healthy forests where trees are continually harvested and re-grown.

*Reducing and reusing water*

The industry has steadily reduced its water usage in recent years and continues to work on reducing its impact on water consumption. Back in the 1970's, up to 250m<sup>3</sup> of water was needed to produce one tonne of pulp – today it requires just 50 m<sup>3</sup> – a more than five-fold reduction. Indeed, water consumption by paper-making machines has been reduced by more than 30% in the past 10 years as a result of more efficient water circulation. Water used for paper production is mostly circulated in the system and, while minerals from the wood make it necessary to discharge some amount of water, this is then purified in waste-water treatment facilities.

*Supporting Social Sustainability*

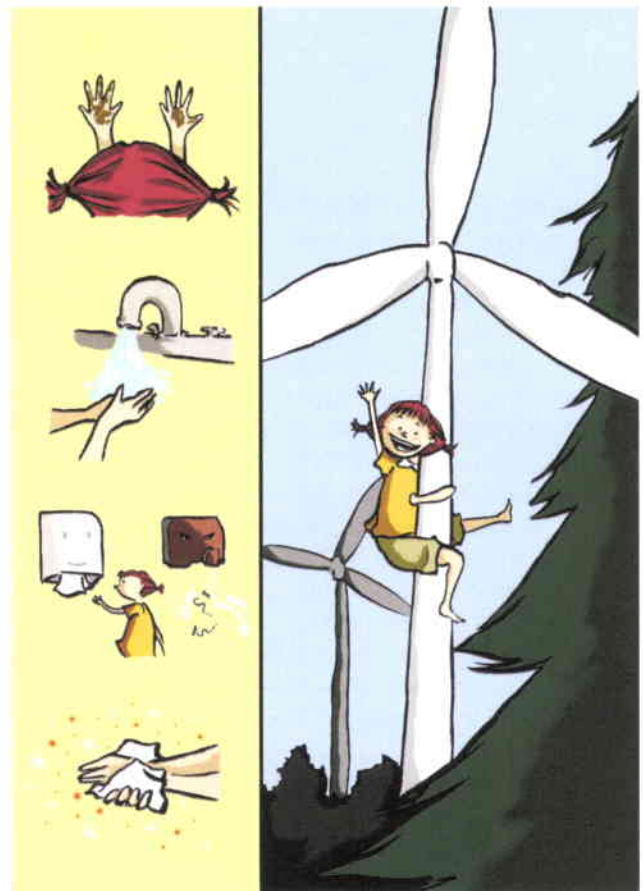
Across the globe, citizens are calling for governments and industries to drive greater sustainability to preserve and protect the earth's resources for future generations. The work undertaken by the tissue paper industry supports this social imperative. It also embraces production models that uphold wider social principles such as the safeguarding of human rights and compliance with the highest ethical and moral principles in dealings with staff, suppliers and the communities in which ETS operates.

ETS members recognise moral, correct, impartial and respectful behaviour as essential foundations in building long-lasting growth. They promote these principles up and down their supply chains by working in cooperation with suppliers, customers, business partners and consumers.

Paper companies are involved in a host of projects to drive social sustainability, from initiatives within their local communities and schools to larger, global campaigns to fight diseases such as the work undertaken by 'Mothers against Malaria'.

**Spearheading sustainable hygiene**

Hygiene and cleanliness are vital in a modern society. They help to promote and maintain high standards of human health and prevent both individual and public health risks. The superior hygiene offered by tissue paper products upholds human health, both at home



Photos: ETS

and in the community, and the industry contributes to social sustainability through a host of products and practices that promote both health and well-being.

Tissue paper products are widely used both domestically and in the away-from-home market supplying hotels, cafés, restaurants, offices, sporting venues and, in particular, the healthcare sector. These products offer significant hygiene benefits:

- **Toilet tissue** is a washroom essential and found in all our homes and restrooms. The use of toilet tissue ensures optimal cleaning and hygiene. During flushing, waste material is effectively removed and the used product containing microbes safely disposed of and flushed down the toilet.
- **Handkerchiefs and facial tissues** provide a hygienic, effective and comfortable-to-use solution for managing coughs, colds and sneezes. They help keep the user clean and confident and at the same time protect other people from potentially dangerous bacterial and viral infections. They work by trapping bacteria and virus particles in the tissue, which is then thrown away before infection can be spread in the air. The hygiene benefits of tissue paper products have even been the subject of promotion campaigns by the UK government. The recent 'Catch it, Bin it, Kill it' public information campaign encouraged ordinary citizens to carry tissues with them to catch coughs and sneezes and then to bin the tissues. It urged that adopting good respiratory and hand hygiene practices was crucial in helping to prevent the spread of flu and other infections and acknowledged the effectiveness of tissue paper products in supporting this.

→ **Kitchen towel, food napkins and wipers** are tissue products used in the home or in food service areas. They have multiple uses which range from absorbing oil or moisture from foods or cleaning to wiping up spills. In the latter case, they help to remove potentially harmful microbes from work surfaces and utensils. As a disposable product, the microbes are thrown away with the used tissue. Reusable cloths are well known to harbour microbes.<sup>5</sup>

→ **Paper towels** or hand towels are the optimal means of hand drying after handwashing, as they absorb water and microbes from the surfaces of the hands, a fact that has been widely acknowledged by the academic community. Independent research consistently demonstrates that single-use towels offer the most hygienic option for drying hands in public washrooms. Peer reviewed and published studies by leading microbiologists at the University of Westminster and University of Leeds demonstrate that single-use towels spread fewer bacteria and viruses into the air and environment than any other hand drying option. This is particularly important when handwashing is sub-optimal – something that is all too often the case. Using single-use towels to dry hands significantly reduces the risk of transmission of microorganisms. Jet air and warm air dryers have been found to transmit more virus particles further and at different heights than single-use towels, with significantly greater airborne virus counts.<sup>6,7,8</sup>

**Economic Sustainability**

ETS and its members recognise that sustainability creates value. Protection of the environment and economic success can and should go hand-in-hand, delivering benefits for shareholders, customers and the planet.

*Safety first*

The quality and safety of products and the safety of the workforce is just as important as economic success for ETS members. Safety in the workplace is a perfect example. It is a fundamental prerequisite of sustainability as well as a legal and ethical obligation. Upholding optimal safety is rooted in respect, and many of our members operate a zero accident culture in their mills. When employees are confident that management is placing safety as a number one priority, they will be motivated to work more effectively. This drives a virtuous circle for the prosperity of the organisation and is a principle embraced by the paper industry.

*Innovation drives growth*

Paper has been innovating for almost 2000 years, in order to meet our ever-changing needs. Today’s paper industry continues to be technologically innovative with production processes ensuring that energy, water consumption and the production of climate altering gases are all minimised, while new paper grades for new applications are constantly created and finding new markets.

Paper is manufactured in large, tailor-made machines that require highly sophisticated control equipment and process computers. The production is totally computerised and automated, and the machines that produce paper contain more electronics than a Boeing 777!

Innovation means that paper is used in a host of novel applications, from scratch-and-sniff books through to packaging, batteries and even components of rockets. In the future, ETS could see paper as a raw material for everything from plastics to cars and solar panels.

**Upholding the principles advanced in ‘The Sustainability Edge’**

ETS subscribes to the principles detailed in the recent book, ‘The Sustainability Edge: How to drive top-line growth with triple-bottom-line thinking’, which advances the principle that sustainability can deliver consistent, competitive advantage. Written by former Kimberly-Clark Corporation Sustainability Officer, Suhas Apte, and Jagdish N. Sheth, Professor of Marketing in the Goizueta Business School at Emory University, the book helps businesses understand how they should deal with stakeholders and contribute to a healthy planet.

By identifying nine key stakeholders, it offers a step-by-step roadmap on how to embrace a triple-bottom-line mindset. It advances a new way of growing that revolves around partnership, collaboration, supply chains and local communities. It argues that incremental improvements are no longer enough and that organisations need transformational business strategies to be successful – and sustainable – in the future. The delivery of triple-bottom-line growth requires companies to decouple revenue growth from the depletion of the earth’s resources and to redefine it as prosperity and human well-being.

The book contains sound advice for how businesses should deal with stakeholders to contribute to a healthy planet. In addressing each of the nine stakeholders, businesses will also be acting in the interests of the tenth, silent stakeholder – the Environment.



**About ETS**

ETS is the European Tissue Paper Industry Association. The members of ETS represent the majority of tissue paper producers throughout Europe and around 90 % of the total European tissue production. ETS was founded in 1971 and is based in Brussels. For more information, please visit [www.europeantissue.com](http://www.europeantissue.com).