



By Joanne Hunter

The drive to take recycled paper upmarket into big-time magazine publishing is no pulp fiction

## RCF FOR MAGAZINES?

**In the UK, WRAP is investigating how more recycled content in magazine paper would affect the newsprint industry**



**H**UGE EFFORTS ARE going into making the UK self-sufficient in recovered fiber (RCF) to produce publishing paper by a process of reading material-to-reading material recycling. Is it because that “green and pleasant” land could otherwise be under a rising sea of waste paper when the global economy turns the tide in the demand for RCF away from China?

Meanwhile, mainland Europe’s recycled paper mills fear a shortage in raw pulp product as the Asian competition hikes up prices.

The latest paper industry recycling statistics reveal “very interesting” national trade balances among the EU 25 Member States observes environmental manager, Sappi Fine Paper Europe, Maastricht, the Netherlands, Jens Kriete.

The 2005 figures for the UK show a strong increase in

waste paper exports. It is the biggest net exporter in Europe thanks to an improvement in collection efforts while demand has remained stable. German export figures however mark a decline since 2004: “Collection and separation levels did not change but massive investments in recovered fiber-based paper mills took place.”

Kriete goes on to note that breakeven is expected this year and it is further expected that Germany will become a net importer of recovered paper in the future.

Recently recovered paper prices have shown a steep increase. The worldwide trade in paper fiber for recycling and demand and supply imbalance inevitably will take its toll on prices for raw material and final cost of product.

At the moment recovered fiber can “freeload” its way to Asia on returning container ships. This can make it

cheaper to export to a far-off continent than to another European country.

Chinese newsprint producers import UK recovered paper and the UK imports the finished product. Publishers have been taking some Chinese newsprint “to keep local suppliers on their toes,” says one.

It won't always be like this and current moves to create a UK self-sustainable supply and demand could foreshadow a shift in the global paper economy.

The UK magazine industry is being given impetus to extend its use of recycled content paper in a project funded by the UK Government's Waste & Resources Action Programme (WRAP). The aim is to provide a solid commercial and environmental case for investment in recycled magazine paper mills.

Having reviewed the opportunities and potential barriers the next step is to set up commercial trials and develop case studies.

Currently magazine publishing in the UK consumes around one million tonnes of paper annually, “and only a small fraction (1-3%) contains recycled content” says paper technical manager at WRAP, Mike Burgess.

He believes that if this sector uses a higher proportion of recycled fiber, it will ensure long-term end markets for RCF. To build demand and a rich market for recycled content paper will help divert paper from landfill.

Recycled magazines and other high grades of paper are important to a sustainable paper loop because they renew the recovered fiber “wealth”. The WRAP project, which UPM is overseeing, will look at how a greater recycled content magazine paper affects the UK recycled newsprint industry. The other project partners are research body Pira International, publishing houses EMAP, Reed Business Publishing and Redwood, *Hello!* magazine, printers Polestar and Pensold Limited, and the Newspaper Publishers Association (NPA) and Periodical Publishers Association (PPA).

Deputy chief executive at the PPA, Nick Mazur, says some members are already using RCF in the manufacturing process: “Magazines with near-virgin fiber already play a key role within the recycling process. There are many potential applications for recycled content within the industry and the purpose of this project is to provide clear guidance to allow publishers to make informed choices.”

UK printer Pensold Limited prints controlled circulation magazines — around 300 titles. Paper is usually either specified or supplied by the publisher. Chief executive Tony Jones has seen a significant amount of progress in the runnability of recycled paper in the last couple of years. For the printer, wash-up and other process prob-



lems downstream have reduced and quality has become more consistent and more stable. Recycled paper is moving toward machinery needs, says Jones.

His customers are looking for whiteness and concerned with cost and “bulking” issues. They want the look and “feel” of value. One year the fashion might be for “designer” matt; another year, for gloss or silk. Jones believes recycled grades will have to be able to perform to order and offer the grammage and opacity factors to suit all-comers.

Jones wants to be able to recommend recycled product. He would, though, want to know it is the most environmentally friendly option. He sees its use as a “goodwill exercise” and a unique selling point to add value. **PPI**

