The Scrap Recycling Industry:

Paper

Recovered fiber, also known as recovered paper and board, is one of the most widely recycled materials in the world. Since 1990, Americans have recycled more than 1.1 billion tons of recovered fiber as the recovery rate for paper and paperboard in the United States increased by more than 30 percentage points to reach 65.8 percent in 2017. The paper recycling segment of the scrap recycling industry collects, sorts, and processes the recovered fiber into specification grade products that were valued at $8.1 billion in 2017. These products are sold and transported to paper mills at home and worldwide for production into new packaging, office paper, tissue, newsprint, and a multitude of other paper products.

In the United States, approximately 77 percent of paper mills rely on recovered fiber to make some or all of their products due in part to recovered paper’s significant cost and energy savings. In addition, the paper and fiber recovered in the United States helps to meet growing overseas demand: recovered paper was exported to more than 85 different countries last year at a value of approximately $3.2 billion, not including the tremendous environmental benefits and energy savings, while significantly helping our balance of trade.

18.3 million tons of recovered paper were exported in 2017 including:
- 1.8 million tons of printed news;
- 9 million tons of corrugated cardboard;
- 3.5 million tons of mixed paper;
- 904,000 thousand of high-grade paper;
- 2.3 million tons of other mechanical paper; and
- 756,000 thousand tons of pulp substitutes

Recovered paper is exported to more than 85 countries including: Canada, China, India, South Korea, and Mexico.

Since 1990, Americans have recycled more than 1.1 billion tons of recovered fiber.

Each percentage point of recovery represents roughly 770,000 tons of fiber — enough weight to fill more than 7,000 railroad cars.

Recycling one ton of paper saves 3.3 cubic yards of landfill space.

More than two and a half times more paper is recycled than is sent to landfills.

The total economic impact of the paper recycling industry in 2017 was $46 billion.

Energy saved using recycled materials versus virgin materials is up to 60 percent.

Nearly 77 percent of all U.S. papermakers use some recovered paper to make everything from newspaper to paper packaging to office paper.

Some of the world’s earliest pieces of paper were made using scrap material.