

Know your papers!

When recycled is *not* the responsible option

In the enthusiasm for recycling and the assumed economic advantages of recycled material, librarians should be wary of the limitations of recycled paper, which is something of an unknown quantity. There is as yet no standard definition of recycled paper, and while one could stretch the term to include the high quality paper made from cotton waste, it usually means simply paper made from recycled pulp. Paper fibre loses some 50 per cent of its strength in recycling, how it performs and lasts will depend considerably on how much virgin fibre is added and the processes and materials used in the recycling. Much about the effect of these processes and materials is still unclear and because of variations in the recycled materials used there are usually variations from one batch to the next in the recycled paper. Recycled paper presents problems for printing — damage to machines from the irregular surface and difficulty in 'setting' ink have been noted.

Although some suppliers claim otherwise, paper with a high recycled content is generally less chemically stable and less durable than paper produced from bleached chemical pulp. The recycled paper now manufactured is suitable for uses with a limited life, but it is not suitable for books or any printed material intended to be kept for more than a few years.

Permanent paper on the other hand is designed for long-term retention. Indeed, the initiative for such paper has largely come from librarians concerned for the preservation of book stock and of archivists responsible for the preservation of records. There is general agreement that 'permanent' paper should have a life of some hundreds of years under normal library/archive storage conditions. It should be made of cotton or linen pulp, fully bleached wood pulp, or a mixture of these, and be free of unbleached woodpulp or groundwood (bleaching destroys much of the lignin in the woodpulp, which otherwise causes oxidation and yellowing in the paper). The paper should have a minimum pH of 7.5, be sized with neutral or alkaline sizing material and have a 2 per cent minimum alkaline reserve ('filler') or calcium or magnesium carbonate ('chalk'), which protects the paper against acid hydrolysis and air pollution. Performance standards relating to folding endurance (which is related to fibre length) and tear resistance are also applied. For printed material, it is specified that no acid or chlorine printing inks be used. There is as yet no Australian standard for permanent paper but draft requirements were issued by the Standard Association in 1984 and an interim

standard is soon to be issued by Committee MS/48 of Standard Australia. Specifications have recently been published by the Australian Archives for their own use.

Printers and publishers frequently cite the higher cost of permanent paper as a reason for not considering it in normal publishing. But in fact locally-made papers meeting the 1984 draft requirements are available in Australia, notably 'Perpetuum', 'Goatskin Parchment' and 'Conqueror' made by APPM and the 'Bookprint' papers made by APM. It has been estimated that their use would only add something between 3 per cent and 9 per cent to the total cost of book production. As with recycling, the initiative must come from the consumer. The research, agitation and consciousness-raising by bodies like the AICCM, ALIA and the Australian Archives, and lobbying by individual clients have encouraged the manufacture of permanent paper and its use by publishers. As the demand for paper conforming to the standards of permanent paper increases, so the cost will decrease and the visual qualities and variety demanded by publishers will appear. And from the librarian's point of view, the use

of permanent paper is the cheapest form of preventive conservation, much cheaper than restoring books.

The so-called economics of recycling have little relevance for books intended to be kept for long-term reference and research. Librarians should be keeping abreast of current developments and recognising the distinct properties and uses of recycled and permanent papers. We should be adding our voices to the demand for the use of permanent paper, and be informed enough to explain to paper suppliers and publishers, in language they will recognise, just what it is we want, and why.

Further information can be found in *A guide to the use of recycled paper* (AGPS, 1990), and the Proceedings of the 1990 AICCM Conference (*AICCM Bulletin* 16, 1990). There is also a series of leaflets setting out the standard minimum requirements for permanent paper and the suppliers able to meet these standards, available from the Storage and Preservation Section of the Australian Archives Central Office, Canberra.

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