

Growing trend toward forestry certification for corrugated packaging

Japan's corrugated industry is seeing a growing trend toward acquisition of forestry certification. Leading the field is the largest manufacturer, Rengo, which acquired certification by the Forest Stewardship Council (FSC®), first for all its paperboard mills in February 2015, then for all its corrugated plants in August of the same year.

FSC certification is one of the international certification systems that certify appropriately managed forests and appropriate processing and distribution of lumber harvested from the forests. As environmental awareness grows worldwide, demand for products with environmental credentials is expected to grow ever greater. This is reflected in Japan too, where for instance all products procured for use in the 2020 Tokyo Olympic and Paralympic Games will be required to demonstrate FSC or other relevant certification. This is forecast to lead to increased demand for environment-friendly products among sponsor enterprises and other involved parties.

Already, recovered paper accounts for the majority of the raw material used in corrugated packaging, bringing it recognition in Japan as an environment-friendly packaging material intrinsically suited to recycling. However, acquiring third-party forestry certification will publicize more visibly this strong environmental performance and therefore offers the benefit of boosting public confidence.

Among industry customers too, and especially among manufacturers of articles that are familiar to consumers through everyday use, the adoption of forestry-certified corrugated packaging is growing. Indeed, there are even manufacturers who have announced a policy of switching to certified products for all their corrugated box needs within the next few years. There is a growing trend to follow suit among manufacturers of everyday articles, foodstuffs, and similar products. As a result, major corrugated manufacturers other than Rengo are also moving one after another to acquire certification.

Acquiring certification involves creating internal structures that allow tracking of raw material procurement and clear identification of certified products. It additionally requires an employee education system to be put in place. As certified organizations are also required to pass yearly inspections and to pay the necessary fees, there is a corresponding cost burden. On the other hand, once forestry certification is acquired, corrugated products can be labeled accordingly, meaning that they can be promoted to consumers as environment-friendly products, and an improved standing in the corrugated industry can also be expected.