A luxury papermaker is collaborating with recyclers to produce high quality papers from recycled take-away cups.

Finding new ways to recycle the ever-growing amount of waste has seen the development of ideas such as a plant-based, compostable bottle and reusable smart cups. Now, a luxury paper maker has developed a way to turn used coffee cups into new paper and plastic products. James Cropper Paper are makers of bespoke, luxury papers for upmarket brands all over the world. In 2013, the company opened a facility dedicated to its new Cupcycling process – the world’s first take-away cup recycling process. In the past, take-away cups proved complicated to recycle due to their combination of paper and plastic. To get around the difficulties, the new process creates a unique closed-loop recycling solution. Recently, James Cropper partnered with upmarket department store Selfridges to turn disposable coffee cups from its store into the paper used to create the stores’ iconic yellow shopping bags.

Once used, disposable cups from the Selfridges food hall and offices are ‘tipped, flipped and stacked’ – a process which ensures any remaining liquid is drained and separates the lid, sleeve and cup. Environmental solutions partner Veolia then bales the cups and delivers them to James Cropper’s Cupcycling plant. At the plant, the paper fiber is separated from the polyethylene, with the paper being used to create new Selfridges bags and other luxury papers, and the polyethylene going on to a processor to be recycled into products such as plastic tubing and cable wraps. The new paper products can themselves later be recycled in the standard paper waste stream.
With an estimated 2.5 billion take-away cups thrown away each year in Britain alone, the ability to recycle even a proportion of this is a huge leap forward in sustainability. In a press release, James Cropper managing director Steve Adams noted that the plant, “has so far recycled more than 6 million used cups – a figure that with partnerships like those with Selfridges, Veolia and others is expected to continue to rise.” He added that James Cropper is “more than prepared to cope with such a boom, with the plant currently having the capacity to recycle 500 million paper cups each year.” Could this new recycling process make a difference in the amount of paper and plastic waste produced each year?

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