

Paper Cartons: Keeping Resources in Circulation, Not in the Trash

- Public-private MOU signed to establish a “Closed Loop” resource circulation system for paper cartons
- Separate collection of paper cartons at apartment complexes nationwide to begin voluntarily in October, followed by full implementation from January 1, 2027

The Ministry of Climate, Energy and Environment (MCEE, Minister Kim Sungwhan) announced that it will sign a memorandum of understanding (MOU) with relevant companies and organizations on the morning of September 21 at Hansol Paper Daejeon Plant, located in Daedeok-gu, Daejeon, to improve the paper carton recycling system.

The companies and organizations participating in this MOU include obligated recycling producers* (Seoul Milk, Maeil Dairies), recycling industry representatives (Paper Carton Recycling Council, Hansol Paper, Ssangyong C&B), paper carton manufacturers (SIG Combibloc Korea, Tetra Pak), and relevant organizations (Korea Packaging Recycling Cooperative, Korea Resource Circulation Service Agency).

* Under the Act on the Promotion of Saving and Recycling of Resources, entities that manufacture or import products or packaging subject to mandatory recycling are required to directly collect and recycle the relevant waste or share the costs necessary for its recycling.

This MOU was established to improve the current collection, sorting, and

recycling system, under which a significant amount of paper cartons, which are made from high-quality raw materials such as virgin pulp and therefore having high resource value, is disposed of in standard garbage bags or mixed with ordinary waste paper, resulting in such cartons being incinerated as residual waste during the recycling process.

Under this MOU, each party will share responsibility for serving as a key link in the circular system. First, obligated recycling producers will share the costs of collecting, sorting, and recycling paper cartons and expand their purchases of recycled paper carton products, thereby serving as a stable source of demand in the market.

Paper carton manufacturers will develop technologies that take recyclability into account from the packaging design stage and support the advancement of sorting systems, such as the installation of optical sorters, thereby laying the foundation for securing high-quality recyclable resources.

The recycling industry will deliver tangible results in resource circulation through high-quality sorting and the production of recycled paper carton products. The Korea Packaging Recycling Cooperative and the Korea Resource Circulation Service Agency will encourage industry participation by strengthening public awareness campaigns and providing administrative and financial support, including managing recycling performance and providing recycling subsidies.

The MCEE will strengthen institutional support to ensure that voluntary efforts by the private sector lead to tangible results in resource circulation. To this end, starting in October this year, separate collection of paper cartons will be voluntarily implemented in advance, focusing on apartment complexes subject to mandatory management nationwide (approximately 144,000 apartment buildings)^{*}, and relevant guidelines^{**} will be revised to make separate collection mandatory for these apartment complexes from January 1, 2027.

^{*} Apartment housing subject to mandatory management under Article 2 of the Enforcement

Decree of the Multi-Family Housing Management Act (300 households or more, etc.)

****Guidelines on the Separate Collection of Recyclable Resources**

This MOU is significant as a starting point for establishing a “Closed Loop” resource circulation system in which paper cartons are reliably collected after disposal and transformed into recycled raw materials and recycled products, going beyond merely declaring cooperation.

It is also expected to contribute to revitalizing the domestic recycling market by establishing a high-quality paper carton recycling system and ensuring a stable supply of high-quality recycled pulp.

Minister Kim Sungwhan said, “This MOU is a meaningful commitment to connect the entire process, from the production of paper cartons to their recycling, into a single circular system.” He added, “We will do our utmost to establish the institutional foundation and provide policy support, including the creation of a separate collection system for paper cartons, so that the paper carton recycling system can become firmly established on the ground.”