
Recycling Used Liner: How Label Converters Overcome Logistical Challenges

The recycling of the used liner is less of a technical challenge than a logistic one. Indeed, solutions to recycle the paper liner already exist: CELAB has identified 10 partners across Europe able to recycle or repurpose it into different materials.

Today there is more recycling capacity than the collected volumes.

One of the obstacles to collecting more volume is that the 490 ktons of used liner in Europe are very fragmented at hundreds of thousands of different sites spread over Europe.

Some companies generate important volumes that are economically interesting to be picked up by the waste collectors and transported to a recycler. But small volumes are less interesting in that regard.

However, some label converters have decided to solve the challenge by offering a collection service to their customers, so that the used liner can follow a circular model.

This is the case of **CCL Label, Scandinavia**, one of the CELAB members, declaring that they collect ALL liner from their customers. No exceptions made. This means that any customers can return liner to the CCL site in Randers at their expense. Then CCL will make sure that it is put back into the value chain by returning it in full trucks to [UPM Plattling](#) (also a CELAB member), who can re-use it in producing “new” liner. “ALL” liner means independent of the original producer of the material, plus also independent of who produced the label. The only condition is that the company is an existing customer of CCL Label.

One of the pioneers in this area is [Ulrich Etiketten](#), Austria’s leading company in the production of self-adhesive- and special labels, which started already in 2010 to collect label release liners from its own label production (trim waste) and their customers, in partnership with [Cycle4green](#), an independent liner collection program (also a partner of CELAB).

Since the introduction of Ulrich Etiketten's recycling service, they have delivered well over 2500 tons of liner in total into recycling corresponding to more than 5000 tons of saving in CO2 emissions.

Another leading initiative is the one from **Coveris** which developed over the years a collection and recovery service to ensure that the self-adhesive label waste from their customers in the UK enters the appropriate recycling streams. The collection of release liner in mainland UK is based on backloads from customers when delivering labels into sites which are further optimised by collecting from other customers that may be within a reasonable distance on the return. Coveris will have an annual total of approximately 700 tonnes of the release liner. The majority of this total will be exported to UPM Plattling for repulping in partnership with UPM Raflatac's [RafCycle](#) service. A smaller volume will be sold for other uses, such as dog bedding, packaging fillers, and the base material for building carbon fibre products. A small proportion of PET release liner is sold to brokers for granulation, but this liner is more difficult to get recycled because it requires an almost zero contamination level. Coveris has set up a recycling hub based in Boston, Lincolnshire. This is a 1500M2 area and is dedicated to serving the Labels & Board Division. In 2020, the hub facilitated the reuse, recycling, and repurposing of over 50% of the total collected waste.

FINAT, which is hosting CELAB-Europe, recognised the merit of Coveris Environmental Services by granting them the Recycling and Sustainability Awards in 2018.

Other label printers follow the same principle of offering a collection service of the used liner to their customers at a competitive cost compared to industrial waste collection. The material is stored at a logistic partner or their site and once the volumes are big enough, a full truck transports it to the recycler. The price paid by the recycler for the used liner plus the contribution from the customer generally balances the transport cost. Here are a few other examples of label printers:

Optimum Group introduced their innovative program, Greenliner in 2019 in Denmark and partially implemented it in Sweden and Norway. The Greenliner program is exclusively available to Optimum Group's valued customers at no extra cost. This program focuses on liner recycling, a vital aspect of their operations. By participating in the Greenliner program, Optimum Group collects approximately 25% of their turnover, amounting to around 600 tons of liner material, from over

50 customers, in collaboration with Cycle4Green. To acknowledge their customers' eco-friendly choices, Optimum Group provides a certificate confirming their utilization of the Greenliner program for liner recycling. Such a successful initiative has led Optimum Group to expand the Greenliner program to the Netherlands since the summer of 2022.

Krämer Druck, a major German wine label printer in the German wine region Rheinhessen, won a local sustainability award with its liner recycling program which is operated in collaboration with UPM Raflatac's RafCycle service. Krämer-Druck provides the wineries with special return transport boxes on appropriate half pallets for the carrier tapes free of charge, so that the work involved in recycling or returning the waste product is kept efficient. The customers only bear the return shipping costs. After dispatch, Krämer-Druck feeds these back into the recycling cycle for special papers (e.g. for magazines) and thus into further recycling cycles.

Mercian Labels, a UK-based label printer launched **Closed Loop** in August 2021, a label liner recycling service helping its customers to reach sustainability goals and contribute to a circular economy. The initiative is operated in partnership with UPM Raflatac's RafCycle service.

Autajon started to collect the used release liner from their wine customers in the Champagne area (France) in 2018 and then extended to other geographical areas (Mediterranean region, Bourgogne, Lorient, Rouen) and sectors (Food and pharmaceutical). The liner is then brought to the recycler in partnership with Cycle 4Green.

Vollherbst, a fourth-generation, family-owned company and a leading supplier of premium labels in the still- and sparkling wine and spirit industries in Germany inspires the industry through packaging innovation with its in-depth understanding of sustainability. Their commitment to sustainability is endorsed by their participation in CELAB as a VskE member (the German label association). As one of the results, the company has recently launched its collection program. Vollherbst takes a "small steps for big leaps" approach to sustainability and, together with its inspiring network of partners and customers, embarks on a fully sustainable future. "We believe sustainability requires innovation, and this is where Südglas and Cycle4Green come in. Südglas collects the leftover carrier tape from wineries on trips it would have made regardless, ensuring that there are no additional CO2

emissions created during collection. Cycle4Green then recycles the waste for future use,” elaborates Stefan Vollherbst. This community-led effort ensures that wineries in the region can participate in sustainability efforts and contribute to the circular economy. Vollherbst has branded this initiative sustainLINERRECYCLING, and it includes various other waste-recycle efforts by the company.

This type of initiative is also possible in smaller label printing companies like **L’Etiquette Adhesive** in the Southwest of France. L’Etiquette Adhesive started to recycle their own used liner that is produced in a relatively high quantity as a result of an over-lamination process. In parallel, they proposed to their customers to receive and store their used liner that is collected by [Soprema](#), a CELAB partner that reprocesses the paper liner in cellulosic insulation material close to their site. Bigger label users can get their liner directly collected by this company while smaller converters have the possibility to get their small volumes collected through l’Etiquette adhesive.

All these initiatives are critical to contributing to the CELAB’s objectives to recycle 75% of the used liner by 2025.

If you have or know about further examples and best practices offered by label companies around Europe, do not hesitate to reach out to CELAB-Europe or FINAT.