

# What is OCC-E Certification and Why Does It Matter?



The push for sustainability is reshaping industries, and packaging is at the forefront of this transformation. As companies and consumers alike demand more eco-friendly solutions, the focus on recyclability has intensified. For businesses using corrugated boxes for shipping and logistics, ensuring every component of their packaging is recyclable is a complex but crucial goal. This is where OCC-E certification comes into play, setting a new benchmark for sustainable labeling.

## Understanding the Challenge in Corrugated Recycling

Old Corrugated Containers (OCC) are one of the most recycled materials globally. However, the integrity of the recycling stream is often compromised. Materials like labels, tapes, and coatings applied to these boxes can introduce contaminants, particularly “stickies” from adhesives. These contaminants can clog machinery at recycling mills, reduce the quality of the recycled pulp, and lower the overall fiber yield.

To address this industry-wide problem, the American Forest & Paper Association (AF&PA) and the Fibre Box Association (FBA) updated a critical standard. This initiative created the 2025 Voluntary Standard for Repulping and Recycling Coated or Treated Corrugated Fiberboard. The goal is to ensure that treated corrugated materials can be successfully recycled using standard mill technology without negatively impacting the process.

This standard creates a unified framework, providing a clear, reliable way for companies to verify that their packaging components won't disrupt the recycling system. It establishes a minimum threshold for materials that are intended and labeled for recycling into new paper products.

### What is OCC-E Certification?

OCC-E certification signifies that a product, meets the requirements of the 2025 Voluntary Standard. The “E” stands for “equivalents,” meaning it applies to materials and components attached to corrugated containers. A product that achieves this certification is proven to be compatible with the existing OCC recycling infrastructure.

The certification process involves a two-part screening method to evaluate a material’s performance in a recycling environment.

#### Part 1: Repulpability Testing

The first stage determines if the material can be effectively broken down. The product is tested to confirm that it can be repulped in a standard, water-based system used by recycling mills. This step is essential to assess if the fiber yield meets a minimum threshold.

#### Part 2: Recyclability and “Stickies” Evaluation

The second stage assesses the quality of the fiber produced after repulping. This test ensures that the label’s adhesive does not create “stickies”—gummy deposits that can reduce the quality of the new paper and cause costly downtime for machinery at the mill. The resulting pulp must be clean and usable for manufacturing new paper products, ensuring that the certification guarantees both repulpability and true recyclability.

Passing both parts of this screening confirms that the product supports a clean recycling stream and contributes to a higher yield of usable fiber.

### What is OCC-E Certification?

OCC-E certification signifies that a product, such as a pressure-sensitive label, meets the requirements of the 2025 Voluntary Standard. The “E” stands for “equivalents,” meaning it applies to materials and components attached to corrugated containers. A product that achieves this certification is proven to be compatible with the existing OCC recycling infrastructure.

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