

Recycled content – Information for Potential Customers

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Steel is the most recycled material in the world and recycled steel is used in the manufacture of all new steel. So it is natural to ask the question “What is the recycled content of my steel?” on the assumption that steel with a higher proportion of recycled content might be more ‘sustainable’. But for steel this is not true.

Steel has been recycled for over 150 years and the recycling process is efficient and economical. Scrap steel is valuable, so wherever it can be recovered, it is, and very little steel ever becomes waste. So, buying steel on the basis of high recycled content does not stimulate further recycling. In fact, it is likely to increase the cost of all steel products.

This view is shared across the metals industry and also by institutions. Rather than attempting to increase the recycled content of steel, the way to make steel-based products more sustainable is to ensure that, at the end of their useful lives, the steel can be easily recovered to ensure continued, economic recycling.

Despite recycled content being an inappropriate measure of the sustainability of steel, certain schemes which cover multi-materials (e.g. LEED certification of buildings) require a recycled content figure.

In the European steel industry as a whole, recycled scrap steel accounts for 56% of total steel making, being made up of 32% pre-consumer and 24% post-consumer scrap. **For purchases of European Steel, we recommend using a recycled content figure of 56% which reflects the total industry position and prevents uneconomic distortions of the market.**

Only by using the approach presented above will the steel recycling infrastructure remain efficient – ensuring that steel continues to be economically recycled, and that costs to end-users of steel are kept as low as possible.

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