



The British Constructional Steelwork Association Limited

4 Whitehall Court, Westminster, London SW1A 2ES

Telephone: 020 7839 8566 Fax: 020 7976 1634

Email: david.moore@steelconstruction.org

Website: www.steelconstruction.org

<i>For the attention of:</i>			
Managing Director	✓	Technical	✓
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26th October 2012

ALL MEMBERS MEMORANDUM No 244/12

RECYCLED CONTENT OF STEEL

One of the most frequently asked questions concerns the recycling of steel and in particular it's recycled content. An answer to this question is set out below to be used by members to support pre-qualification questions on the recycled content of steel.

Is steel recycled?

Unlike most other construction materials steel can be recycled indefinitely without loss of property or performance. This is referred to as multicycling. It means steel always has a value, which guarantees that virtually none is ever disposed of to landfill. The multicycling of steel is a self-sustaining system that predates modern appreciation of environmental issues and would continue in the unlikely event that they should ever lessen in importance.

How much steel is recycled?

Over 500 million tonnes of steel are multicycled worldwide each year – equivalent to 180 Eiffel Towers every day. The recovery rates are high. Research shows that 99% of structural steel arising from demolition sites in the UK is recycled or re-used. There is a conservative estimate that over 80% of all steel scrap that becomes available each year is captured and recycled. This figure increases in poorer economies where the relative value of steel is higher.

Should steel be specified by recycled content?

Recycled content is a driver to encourage recycling of materials which would otherwise be disposed of. However, it is not a suitable driver for metals that are already recovered and recycled close to their maximum. Specifying recycled content for steel does not have any beneficial environmental effect, but can distort the market and result in unnecessary transport costs and emissions. All steel is recyclable and will be multicycled many times without any artificial stimulus.

What figure should be used as the recycled content of structural steel in the UK?

Recycled content varies by process route. Most large scale modern steelmaking processes produce steel with a significant recycled content, as scrap steel is a standard input. When a figure is needed to calculate overall recycled content of a building, the Waste Resource Action Programme (WRAP) recommends applying a standard value of 60% recycled content for structural steel sourced in the UK. This standard value applies to whichever route the steel comes from – blast furnace or electric arc.

Further information on Frequently Asked Questions on Sustainability can be found in AMM 243/12 and on www.steelconstruction.org.

Dr D. B. Moore
Director of Engineering
BCSA