

Thought Leadership



New Tariffs Could Make Toilet Paper More Expensive, Less Soft

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KEY TAKEAWAYS

- > The United States has imposed a 50% tariff on Northern Bleached Softwood Kraft (NBSK) imported from Canada.
- > The tariff could increase manufacturing costs by up to 20% for premium toilet paper and 38% for premium paper kitchen towels.
- > Manufacturers may pass those higher manufacturing costs on to consumers, resulting in higher prices in grocery store aisles.

With the United States imposing new tariffs on select Canadian exports, North Carolina State University experts warn that the escalating trade war could raise the price and reduce the quality of toilet paper and other tissue products.

On Aug. 22, 2026, the U.S. imposed 50% tariffs on approximately \$20 billion worth of Canadian imports, including chemical bleached softwood pulp — technically known as Northern Bleached Softwood Kraft, or NBSK.

“While chemical bleached softwood pulp might sound like a niche commodity, this trade policy lands directly in the grocery store aisle,” said **Ronalds Gonzalez**, an associate professor in the Department of Forest Biomaterials at NC State.

Canadian NBSK is a critical raw material in global tissue manufacturing, accounting for roughly 15% to 30% of the fiber blend in premium bath tissue products and 50% to 65% in premium paper kitchen towels. Brazilian eucalyptus fiber makes up the remaining share.

Gonzalez, a global expert on fibers used in consumer goods, said the 50% tariff on Canadian NBSK could raise manufacturing costs for premium toilet tissue by 11% to 20%, while costs for premium paper kitchen towels could increase by 31% to 38%.

“If you use premium bath tissue or paper towels, these new trade dynamics could soon affect both your wallet and your everyday comfort,” Gonzalez said.

Hasan Jameel, a professor in the Department of Forest Biomaterials at NC State, warned that the added costs may soon translate into higher consumer prices for tissue paper products, including toilet paper and paper towels.

Jameel, whose research areas include pulp production, added that manufacturers might be pushed to substitute Canadian NBSK with U.S.-produced Southern Bleached Softwood Kraft, which provides significantly less softness.

“If tissue producers choose to switch to Southern Bleached Softwood Kraft, the softness of premium tissue products will ultimately be compromised,” Jameel said.

On the other hand, Gonzalez said the tariffs could also create an opportunity to use more locally produced southern softwood fibers for tissue manufacturing, though they are less soft than northern softwood. More research could help close that gap, he said.

Gonzalez and Jameel said the household tissue paper industry is currently caught in a “perfect storm”: Fiber costs continue to rise while market competition remains high, meaning retail price increases may not scale proportionally with manufacturing costs.

In other words, manufacturers may be forced to absorb some of the higher costs rather than pass them entirely on to consumers, putting pressure on their profit margins.

Gonzalez noted that tissue paper produced from recycled fibers, which come from recovered paper sources like office waste and mixed papers, should not be affected. The U.S. produces the vast majority of the recycled paper fiber it uses domestically.

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