

A practical look at environmental issues and trends



In this issue: IS RECYCLED PAPER THE BEST **YOU** CAN DO?

THE PAPER INDUSTRY RECYCLES ENOUGH PAPER EVERY DAY TO FILL A 15-MILE-LONG TRAIN. BUT IS RECYCLING ALL THERE IS TO BEING GREEN AND ENSURING A SUSTAINABLE SOLUTION? NOT BY A LONG SHOT. **HERE'S WHY.** 

## By now we all know the benefits of recycling.

It is an important part of creating a sustainable world. We reuse our products and therefore conserve our valuable natural resources. In many cases we save energy and reduce our impact on the environment. So we might conclude that recycled content in our paper is environmentally superior to virgin fiber, which is obtained directly from trees. However, when we examine the facts, we find that this is not necessarily true. In reality, it takes both kinds of fiber in a mutually supporting cycle to make paper one of the most sustainable products in the world.

certified virgin fiber recycled fiber a smart environmental choice

# FIND A **BALANCE**

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Today more than 50% of paper in the U.S. is recovered, and goals are in place to increase this number. However, demand for recovered fiber worldwide, especially in Asia, is far outstripping supply. And that makes prices rise. To depend completely on recovered fiber would be expensive. It would also be quite impossible. **There just isn't enough recovered fiber** (which comes primarily from the U.S., Europe, and Japan) to keep up with new demands by China and other countries with limited fiber production and recovery capabilities. Combine this demand with the fact that 10 tons of old paper may yield only 8 tons of usable pulp, and you can see that we cannot depend only on recovered fiber. In fact if we tried, we'd run out of paper in a month or two.

Demand isn't the only thing that makes recovered fiber costly. It often costs more to transport recovered fiber to the mill, because it must be shipped up to five times farther than virgin fiber. That longer distance could also result in significantly higher  $CO_2$  emissions.

As you can see, recycling comes at a cost all its own. By balancing it with virgin fiber, however, we can meet demand, and we can reduce paper's environmental impact.

### DOWN TO EARTH INSIGHT

Recycling isn't the only answer in our quest for sustainable living. Virgin fiber from well-managed forests—a renewable and abundant resource—is necessary in achieving real sustainability *and* meeting the ever-rising demand for paper.



## WORLD DEMAND FOR FIBER IS GROWING

In North America, we have responsible forest-management practices in place that ensure replanting and regrowth of abundant forests. So using virgin fiber in North America to produce paper products makes sense when you look at the global fiber balance.

- The need for recovered fiber in Asia, driven largely by China, has been significant and is **expected to continue growing**, as Asia has little available virgin fiber and a limited fiber-recovery infrastructure.
- The demand for recovered fiber is growing about **4%** annually. This growth rate means that **51 million** more tons of recovered fiber will be required by 2012.
- Currently, more than half the recovered fiber exported from the U.S. goes to China.

## **USE** VIRGIN FIBER FOR YOUR HIGH-QUALITY PAPER

How concerned should you be about the amount of post-consumer waste in your paper? That depends on the kind of paper you're using. Recovered fiber is best used in "dark" papers. In a process called *downcycling*, recovered fibers from recycled office paper or high-end printing paper are used in papers designed for less demanding applications, such as manila folders or cardboard. **Downcycling is the most efficient form of recycling**.

When the recovered content is used for a white, bright sheet, on the other hand, we call that *upcycling*. Upcycling demands extra chemicals and resources to de-ink and make recovered fibers white again.

#### For these reasons, virgin fiber makes more sense for bright white papers.

Another concern is quality. Each time fibers are recovered and recycled, they become shorter and more brittle. As a result, too much recovered fiber can compromise a paper's performance and strength. This is why high-end printing papers may contain small amounts of post-consumer waste, or may not contain any at all. Not to worry. Virgin paper can be downcycled multiple times to become packaging, newsprint, and other paper products.

#### DOWN TO EARTH INSIGHT

You don't have to trade quality for a better environment. With good conscience, you can use virgin paper for your high-quality printing needs knowing that the fiber can be downcycled to reduce pressures on our fragile ecosystem.

# TAKE CARE OF **OUR** FORESTS

As long as your paper is certified, you can be sure the virgin fiber in it comes from forests that are responsibly managed. And that assures you that there will be plenty of trees. **In fact, forestland is steadily increasing in the United States.** But you have to look for certification from a credible third-party source, such as the Sustainable Forestry Initiative<sup>®</sup> (SFI<sup>®</sup>) or Forest Stewardship Council (FSC<sup>®</sup>) systems, or both. Their certification is your assurance that endangered forests are being protected and that your paper is being manufactured and distributed in a sustainable manner.

### DOWN TO EARTH INSIGHT

Renewing your resources is just as important as reusing your products. **Paper lets you do both.** 

### FINAL INSIGHT

Virgin and recovered fiber are complementary, and both are important. The proper balance isn't seen so much in the fiber content of a single paper product as it is in global fiber usage, in the way virgin and recycled fibers are distributed and used around the world. Papermakers in some places must rely more on recycled fiber. Those in other areas have easier access to renewable virgin fiber. Both kinds of fiber must be carefully managed and balanced to sustainably meet world demand.

#### FIND OUT MORE

For more information about responsible forestry and sustainable paper solutions, visit these websites:

ippaper.com/sustainability sfiprogram.org fsc.org

treefarmsystem.org abundantforests.org pefc.org

IN THE NEXT ISSUE OF **DOWN** TO **EARTH**: **How big is your carbon footprint?** 

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Sources:

Metafore, "The Paper Fiber Life Cycle", metafore.org/index.php?p=Metafore+Paper+fiber+Life+Cycle&s=570 Pöyry Consulting, poyry.com

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