



Environmentally Preferable Copy Paper Choices: Recycled Paper

Why buy recycled paper?

Buying recycled paper 'closes the loop' – creates demand for recycling, boosts the value of discarded paper and thus makes recycling more economically viable. It is an essential part of reducing the environmental impacts of office paper use. Recycled paper is defined as paper that contains at least 30% post-consumer recycled content.

How does recycled paper reduce environmental harm?

- **Lumber Use:** In the year 2000, 4.6 million tons of copy paper were consumed in the U.S. Producing that amount of virgin copy paper requires as much lumber as needed to build one million average sized homes.
- **Forest Impacts:** More than 90% of the printing and writing paper used in the United States is made from virgin tree fiber, and 16% of that fiber comes from US old growth forests.
- **Waste volume:** Some 4 million tons of office paper are discarded per year in the US. Landfills are currently comprised of 40% paper products, and landfill space is becoming scarce. Every ton of paper diverted saves 3 cubic yards of landfill space for material that is not so easily recyclable.
- **Resource Conservation:** Every ton of paper made from recycled materials instead of virgin wood pulp saves about 17 trees, eliminates the release of 60 pounds of air toxics and prevents the use and contamination of almost 7000 gallons of process water.
- **Energy Consumption:** Recycling paper uses 60% less energy than manufacturing paper from virgin timber -- compared to virgin paper production each ton of recycled paper saves approximately 4000 Kwh -- enough energy to power the average home for six months.

Is recycled paper readily available?

Yes. The federal government requires all its offices to use paper with a minimum of 30% post consumer recycled content – this has created a huge market for recycled paper. Many government and private procurement contracts now specify minimum 30% recycled paper, and supplies are rapidly growing to meet demand for this commodity. Almost every office supply vendor carries recycled paper, including paper stocks with high levels (up to 100%) of postconsumer recycled content. The US EPA also maintains a list of vendors offering paper products with minimum 30% post-consumer recycled content at http://cpg.epa.tms.icfi.com/user/cpg_search.cfm.

Does recycled paper cost more?

Paper is sold as a commodity, and prices vary widely across the country. Prices are also related to volume and negotiating power.

Doesn't recycled paper create problems with copier jams? Paper jams are caused by the quality of the paper and the condition of the paper. Quality recycled paper that does not cause jams is now available. In fact, the State of Massachusetts specifies in its copier repair contract that jams

cannot be blamed on recycled paper.¹ In addition, the State of Minnesota lists minimum 30% recycled content copy paper brands that meet the requirements of the US Government Printing Office, which include being free of lint and fuzz, and having not more than one paper-caused jam per 5,000 continuous copies. (See <http://www.moea.state.mn.us/lc/purchasing/copypaper.cfm>) See “No More Excuses” document found at <http://www.practicegreenhealth.org/educate/purchasing/specontract/> under Paper for results from a test of virgin and recycled copy paper.

See vendor listings at <http://www.conservatree.org/paper/PaperGuide/Copy.shtml>.

¹ Massachusetts Environmentally Preferable Products Procurement Program Product Information: Photocopier Equipment, Supplies & Service, Energy Efficient (Including Remanufactured), <http://www.mass.gov/epp/products/copier.htm>.

Environmentally Preferable Copy Paper Choices: Processed Chlorine Free Paper

Processed chlorine free paper is defined as paper where no chlorine or chlorine compounds were used in the papermaking process and the product contains at least 30% post-consumer content.

Why buy Processed Chlorine Free (PCF) paper?

1. Purchasing PCF copy paper will minimize the production of persistent, bioaccumulative and toxic (PBT) pollutants. This includes dioxin, which can be generated in small amounts during the chlorine dioxide (ECF) bleaching process used by most US paper mills today.²
2. Because PCF paper in general reduces emissions of persistent chlorinated compounds, including dioxin, when compared to the emissions of ECF paper, setting up a contract for PCF paper will prevent pollution and conserve natural resources.
3. Large healthcare organizations may have the purchasing power to bring the recycled content PCF paper price into the same range as virgin ECF copy paper. The purchasing power of a GPO or large system's members, combined with GPO negotiating skills, make it very likely that the contracting organization can obtain prices for PCF paper equal to those it pays in its current, non-PCF copy paper contracts.

What is Processed Chlorine Free (PCF) Paper?

Chlorine bleaching of wood pulp creates and releases significant amounts of chlorinated organic substances – dioxins and furans – that are known to be highly toxic. Different papers are classified by their use of chlorinated bleaching. *Processed Chlorine Free* or *PCF* paper is used to describe recycled paper that has been processed without the use of chlorine bleach on either its virgin fiber or recycled content. This type of paper reduces environmental impacts through recycled content and reduced chlorine-related and other emissions.

It is important to note that “Elemental Chlorine Free,” or ECF paper does not reduce dioxin emissions as completely as the PCF process does. The ECF process uses chlorine dioxide, which reduces but does not eliminate the production and release of toxic chlorinated organics. It is the least environmentally preferable product, because most mills in the US must at a minimum use this process to comply with environmental laws. Some vendors incorrectly refer to this paper as “Chlorine Free.” Don’t be fooled!

Why are dioxin and furans bad?

Chlorinated organic compounds such as dioxin and furans can hinder proper hormonal functioning in exposed organisms and the effects may be widespread as these compounds accumulate up the food chain. Dioxin is implicated as a potent carcinogen, and is associated in animal studies with disturbances of thyroid function, reproductive processes and glucose regulation at very low levels.

Is recycled PCF paper readily available?

Many government and private procurement contracts, including the EPA office supply contract, require vendors to make available PCF recycled paper, and supplies are rapidly growing to meet demand for this commodity. Currently, there are approximately 15 different brands of PCF paper on the market.

Does recycled PCF paper cost more?

Paper is sold as a commodity, and prices vary widely across the country. Prices are also related to volume and negotiating power.

² *Paper Task Force Report*, Environmental Defense, <http://www.environmentaldefense.org/article.cfm?contentid=1689>.