

# Green Tips

April 2007

## *Killing Fewer Trees for Our Paper Needs*

This month's Green Tips comes to us, in part, from the Union of Concerned Scientists and addresses our paper consumption and related choices. See their Green Tips website at [www.ucsusa.org/publications/greentips/](http://www.ucsusa.org/publications/greentips/).

Have you ever evaluated your paper consumption? For example, if you receive junk mail catalogs you don't want, have you considered calling those companies and requesting removal from their mailing list? Note: They often share or purchase mailing lists from one another, so one must be diligent, especially whenever one purchases something on-line.

Do you look for ways to reduce paper consumption and recycle what you must use? We are far from a paperless society, but we can be more aware of our paper purchasing and use decisions. The growing presence of recycled paper has led many people to believe that all paper is now made from recycled materials. This unfortunate misconception has actually decreased demand for recycled paper, causing manufacturers to produce less. As a result, more than 90% of printing and writing paper still comes from virgin tree fiber.

The benefits of producing paper from recycled fibers are many: fewer trees cut down, less water and energy consumed, less pollution generated. And now that studies have shown today's recycled paper products are comparable to conventional products in quality, performance, and cost, the case for buying recycled is stronger than ever. To help expand this market while meeting your needs and budget, ask these questions when shopping for paper products:

### *Ask: What is the percentage of recycled content?*

Recycled paper contains varying percentages of post-consumer waste (paper that has been used and recycled by the consumer); the remaining recycled content derives from miscellaneous paper mill scraps. While any recycled paper is generally better than non-recycled, paper with a higher percentage of post-consumer content is the best choice. If a percentage is not listed, contact the manufacturer.

### *Ask: Where did the paper originate?*

If you cannot buy a paper product that is 100 percent recycled, look for the Forest Stewardship Council (FSC) certification label. This paper comes from forests managed in an environmentally responsible manner.

### *Ask: What about "tree-free" alternatives?*

Paper doesn't have to come from wood pulp. Fibers from hemp, kenaf, flax, cotton, banana stalks, and other plant-based materials can be used to produce paper with fewer chemicals and less energy. Tree-free paper is generally more expensive than its conventional counterpart, but is available from a variety of companies. As with conventional paper, look for a product with high post-consumer recycled content.

### *Ask: How was the paper processed?*

Papers (even tree-free ones) are often bleached with chlorine or chlorine derivatives that form dioxin, a known carcinogen, and other compounds that pollute local air and water supplies. Look for products labeled either "processed chlorine free" (PCF) or "totally chlorine free" (TCF).