

Facts and Myths on Printing Being Bad for the Environment

Various myths abound regarding printing and its effect on the environment. Encouraged to save trees, many people attempt to use less printed matter in favor of electronic communication. However, an honest study of the facts reveals that using print and paper may be a more environmentally friendly method of communicating than using electronic devices. Made primarily from wood, a natural, renewable product, paper is easy to recycle and may be less harmful for the environment because of its sustainability.

Myth: Most paper products come from freshly cut trees.

Fact: Waste products make up most of the fiber used in paper.

Many consumers fail to realize that the carbon footprint left by digital media can be extensive. Discarded electronic products have quickly become major contributors to the growing stream of municipal waste, generating 20 to 50 million tons of e-waste worldwide every year. A strong infrastructure system supports email, online ads and websites, and that infrastructure uses electricity, emits greenhouse gasses and clogs landfills with electronic waste, which can be toxic.

Paper mills use only 11 percent of the forests in the world for making paper, and most paper suppliers are environmentally conscious and know their future success depends on planting at least enough trees to replace those they consume. Responsible production of paper, pulp and wood establishes healthy, growing forests and ensures sustainability.

Young trees absorb CO₂ from the atmosphere as they grow, and because it is a wood product, paper continues storing carbon during its lifetime. The trees in forests planted, harvested and re-planted specifically for use in making paper products absorb more carbon dioxide than do the older trees in mature forests, removing millions of tons of greenhouse gas emissions.

Many people mistakenly believe that printed materials have a negative impact on the environment. However, a review of some myths and facts about printing reveals that print is not detrimental to the environment but is one of the most environmentally friendly methods of conveying information.



In the United States, many manufacturers use one-third recycled paper, one-third sawmill scraps and wood chips and only one-third new-growth trees to make paper. In addition, 200 US paper mills use only recovered fiber to produce paper products.

Myth: Printing depletes forests.

Fact: Printing supports trees.



Myth: The number of trees is decreasing.

Fact: Forests and trees are plentiful.

Paper mills do not cut down mature trees from old forests to make paper. Conflicting with popular opinion, most of the wood used to produce paper comes from trees grown on tree farms where landowners grow acres of trees like their neighbors grow wheat, corn and other crops. Trees are a renewable crop, with

replanting taking place after each harvest. By buying trees from tree farms, the printing industry provides private landowners with the financial incentive to keep planting

and harvesting trees instead of using or selling their land for non-agricultural purposes. Using more wood encourages growers to produce more trees and keep the cycle going.

In the last 20 years, the area covered with forests in this country has grown by 12 million acres. In addition, during the last half of the 20th century and the first decade of the 21st century, the number of live trees remaining after harvesting and mortality increased by 49 percent. Forest certification standards in the US

Myth: Save trees by using email and other non-printed media.

Fact: Paper is recyclable, and digital media has its own carbon footprint.

ensure that wood used by the country's paper mills comes from certified, sustainable forests managed with ecologically sound practices.

Recycling programs are very popular in the US, and at least 87 percent of Americans have access to those programs. The number of recycled printed materials continues to grow, with more than 63 percent of printed matter in the country being recycled currently. Businesses can use recycled paper fibers for producing consumer goods and manufacturing construction products as well as for paper production, where the companies can reuse the fibers several times.

Viewing news online can consume 20 percent more carbon than reading a printed newspaper consumes. In addition, sending

one email with a 400k attachment to 20 people is comparable to 20 minutes of burning a 100w light bulb.

Myth: Print is harmful to the environment.

Fact: Printing is sustainable, renewable and environmentally friendly.

In reality, the impact of printing and paper

industries on the environment is more positive than it is negative, and those businesses actually help promote healthy forests. When making decisions about the use of paper and printing, it is important to consider the facts instead of the misleading information and opinions. 