

Recycled, Chlorine-Free Paper - Good for You, Your Wallet and the Environment

The average North American uses more than 730 pounds of paper each year. That's as much as a tree as big around as a utility pole standing 4 stories high. Though home to only about 7% of the world's population, North America consumes nearly 30% of the world's wood harvest. The average office employee creates nearly 2 pounds of paper waste each and every day. That's a lot of trees to go through! Now, we all know that it is in our best interest to reduce, reuse and recycle, but few of us realize that the easiest way to do that is by changing our paper purchasing habits.

Just What Is Recycled Paper, Anyway?

Recycled paper is any paper that is made of at least 30% post-consumer content. That means that 30% of the paper pulp used to manufacture it came from recycled paper. Paper that had already been used, printed on, mailed as junk mail - they all came together to form new paper. Someone else had made the decision to recycle their paper waste and somebody somewhere decided to turn that waste into new paper. It's really that simple.

What About Chlorine-free? What's That All About?

Some paper manufacturers, and even some recyclers, use chlorine to bleach the paper a nice, bright white. We North Americans are obsessed with bright white paper, by the way. Everything from our office paper to our toilet paper has to be whiter than snow, and unless the paper manufacturers are using oxygen or hydrogen peroxide, they are using chlorine dioxide to get that bright whiteness we crave. Paper can be acceptably bleached using oxygen and/or peroxide without adding harsh chemicals to the paper.

OK, Why Should I Use Recycled, Chlorine-Free Paper?

1.) It's Good For the Environment.

As stated above, a good bit of the world's trees are going to make paper. Recycling paper can save 20 trees per ton of paper. "I'm no tree-hugger," you say, "Why should I care?" Well, you should care because it's your world, too. Even you don't care about the trees perhaps you care about the water. Paper production is a water-intensive process. A one-ton batch of recycled paper uses 7,000 gallons less to produce than a one-ton batch of virgin paper. But maybe even 7,000 gallons of water isn't enough to get you to change your mind. How about 60% less electricity? Does that do it for you? Because that's how much less energy is needed to process recycled paper over producing paper from virgin stock. That's a lot of light bulbs!

On the post-production end of things, nearly 40% of all our waste products in the US and Canada are paper products. That's a lot of paper to put into landfills or send up in incinerator smoke. We waste millions of pounds of recyclable paper materials every year. We don't need to cut down acre after acre of timber to supply our paper needs. Most of our paper needs can be met through the use of recycled paper. But, we have to recycle it first. And then we have to show that there is enough of a demand for recycled paper products to warrant the manufacturers to continue to use recycled materials to create new items.

2.) It's Good For You

We'll skip the bit about having more trees making the world a cleaner, healthier place to live and head straight to your immediate environmental concerns. Bleached paper gives off dioxins. Dioxins pollute our soil, water and air. They cause fish to die or become deformed. They are in our food and milk supply. Dioxins cause cancer. They can cause other maladies in infants and children. They are nasty little beasties that we willingly let into our offices and homes through the use of bleached paper. Buying only Processed Chlorine Free (PCF) paper can ensure that you are not polluting your personal space with dioxins through your paper supplies. Your employees, your family, and even your own body will thank you for it later.

3.) It's Good For Your Wallet

Did you know that there are companies out there that buy paper waste for recycling? They can produce recycled paper products cheaper and easier than manufacturing virgin paper stock. That means that recycled paper can be (and usually is) cheaper than paper with less than 30% post-consumer content. PCF paper is even cheaper still, as peroxide and oxygen used in the bleaching process are not as expensive for the manufacturer as the chlorine dioxide he might otherwise use. All of this adds up to savings for you, the consumer. And saving green is certainly a reason to go green, don't you think?

Buying and using recycled, PCF paper products is a smart choice for every one, from the business owner to the home owner. The triple benefits of using 30% post-consumer content, chlorine-free paper make it the best choice overall.

Think With Ink

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About the Author

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