

# PAPER SAVING OPPORTUNITIES, BENEFITS, AND LEADERS

A FACT SHEET FROM THE ENVIRONMENTAL PAPER NETWORK

**Making more efficient use of paper is good for forests, climate, public health, human rights, and equity. It's also good for organizational budgets, competitiveness, and morale, and for communities and households.**

**This fact sheet highlights the successes of innovative leaders at businesses and non-profit, education, and government entities who have made paper efficiency changes to achieve these benefits, and will help you identify opportunities to make your own.**

*The many benefits for organizations of reducing paper waste fit in three categories:*

## 1. REDUCE WASTE, REDUCE COSTS

Your organization could be missing out on the major cost savings of reducing paper waste. The United States Chamber of Commerce Foundation's Corporate Citizenship Center (CCC) and partners released a report in 2016<sup>1</sup> on waste at over 5,000 of the largest publicly traded companies in the U.S. Among their key findings was that paper is the largest waste category, and that if these same companies reduced paper waste by just 1 percent it would save them nearly \$1 billion. Lower paper volumes benefit your bottom line by directly reducing your purchasing costs. But the indirect costs of paper are even greater. When you purchase paper, there's a cost commitment to every step of handling it. Yale University says that those indirect costs, such as "Printing, faxing, storing, recycling...add up to 30 times the cost of purchased paper."<sup>2</sup>

## 2. MAKE A SIGNIFICANT IMPACT ON CLIMATE, FORESTS, HUMAN RIGHTS, AND EQUITY

Paper saving policies, and responsible choices for essential paper needs, are a powerful way to align your organization's operations with its values and be more socially and environmentally responsible. While there have been some improvements in the industry, with more responsibly-made products available and a stronger recovery rate for paper waste relative to other products, paper production requires large amounts of energy, water, chemicals, land and fiber and has impacts on rivers, forests, the climate and communities through its life-cycle. Paper access is also inequitable around the globe, with North America's per person paper use at four times the global average, for instance, while Africa's is at one eighth.<sup>3</sup> The public is expecting better. The *2015 Cone Communications/Ebiquity Global CSR Study*

found that over 90 percent of global consumers expect companies to operate responsibly "to address social and environmental issues," that over 80 percent seek out responsibly-made products, and 90 percent of consumers would "boycott a company if they learned of irresponsible or deceptive business practices."<sup>4</sup> The impacts of paper efficiency can be estimated with tools such as the **Paper Calculator**, communicated to stakeholders and integrated with your larger sustainability goals.

## 3. ATTRACT TALENT IN A COMPETITIVE AND CHANGING WORLD

Adopting paper saving measures can increase the efficiency of your teams and your standing with job candidates. A UCLA-led study found that companies with green practices have employees that are 16 percent more productive. "Employees in such green firms are more motivated, receive more training, and benefit from better interpersonal relationships," said one of the co-leads of the research. "The employees at green companies are therefore more productive than employees in more conventional firms."<sup>5</sup> Today's workforce is seeking employers with sustainable operations. The *2016 Cone Communications Millennial Employee Engagement Study* found that "76 percent consider a company's social and environmental commitments when deciding where to work" and "75 percent say they would take a pay cut to work for a responsible company."<sup>6</sup>

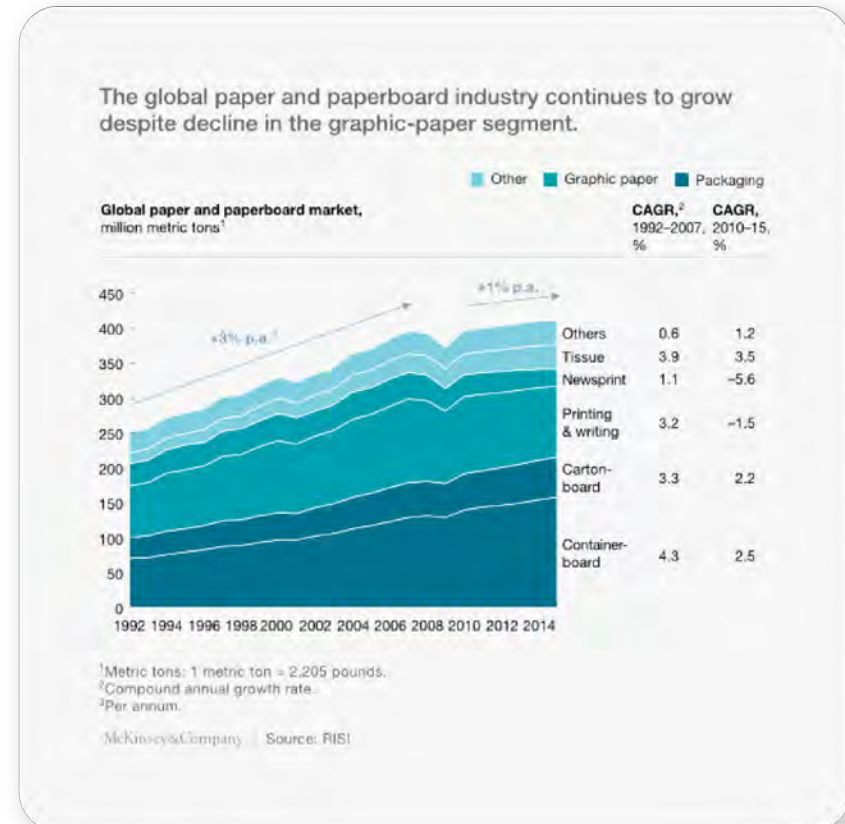
## HOW PAPER CONSUMPTION IS CHANGING AROUND THE WORLD

Reducing waste is possible across many types of paper products. The graph to the right shows the market for different kinds of paper products worldwide and shows which markets for paper products are decreasing, which are increasing, and how the global market continues to grow overall. In some countries in Europe and North America in particular, there have been substantial reductions in consumption of printing and writing paper, a category which represents about a quarter of global paper use by volume. Globally use of both newsprint and printing papers has declined since 2010. The most rapid growth is in sanitary paper (tissue), although it accounts for less than 10 percent of global volume at present. There have been large increases in the markets for packaging in the forms of cartonboard and corrugated products, part of the rapid growth of e-commerce, often called the “Amazon effect.” In sum, the total volume of the world’s paper use is steadily increasing, pushing further into unsustainable levels. However, there are many paper efficiency opportunities that companies, institutions, and individuals can take advantage of.

## PAPER PRODUCTS, CHALLENGES, CHOICES, AND LEADERS

### PACKAGING

Much of the increase in the market for packaging paper, including cartonboard and corrugated products, is occurring because of the increase in e-commerce, which rose almost 25 percent between 2016 and 2017.<sup>7</sup> Package delivery by the United States Postal Service increased 65 percent between 2009 and 2016.<sup>8</sup> Along with the increase in demand for paper for the shipping products, this increase affects the waste and recycling stream.<sup>9</sup>



Last year, as use of corrugated containers rose 3.5 percent in the U.S., 300,000 fewer tons of corrugated containers were recycled.<sup>10</sup> Non-paper packaging presents a host of problems as well. Both customer complaints about wasteful packaging and shipping costs to retailers are creating a market for more sustainable packaging.<sup>11</sup> Online retailer Amazon is making some steps in the right direction, including “overhauling algorithms to ensure the proper sized boxes are chosen and holding talks with product manufacturers to get them to make smaller packaging for online sales,” according to the *Wall Street Journal*,<sup>12</sup> but Amazon also is replacing some boxes with bubble envelopes,

which include plastic and are hard to recycle. And the problem is outpacing the response of Amazon and other e-commerce retailers. Here are examples of new leadership in reducing paper packaging and packaging use overall:

- Companies such as reusable packaging service RePack, in Finland, and reusable packaging maker Returnity, in the U.S., say they have found more sustainable solutions. According to RePack, their data show that RePack users are e-commerce heavy users, spending 30 percent more on average and shopping more often.<sup>13</sup> According to Returnity, their packaging is reusable for up to three years and offers a return on investment after five to seven uses.<sup>14</sup>
- Outdoor retailer REI has been prioritizing sustainability for over a decade. For example, the company used design innovations to help reduce consumer packaging by 36 percent between 2011 and 2013, cutting out more than 1.4 million pounds of waste.<sup>15</sup> The company announced new Product Sustainability Standards in 2018, including standards around responsible paper sourcing and the goal of being a zero waste company by 2020.<sup>16</sup> Applying to all products the company sells, the new Standards, said REI, “will help us raise the bar on product sustainability at REI and across the outdoor industry.”<sup>17</sup>
- Lush Cosmetics sells 35 percent of its products with no packaging at all.<sup>18</sup>

## PRINTING AND WRITING PAPER

There are numerous ways to make significant reductions in use of printing and writing paper at businesses and non-for-profit, education, and government entities. Here are some examples of paper saving and the benefits organizations have found:

- Vodafone India encouraged customers to use paperless billing and saved over 313 million sheets of paper in fiscal year 2015-2016.<sup>19</sup>
- The UK retail and banking Co-operative Group transformed the way its staff works, encouraging new, flexible work routines that make the most of digital technology. They reduced paper use in the organization by a staggering 71 percent. When they moved into a new building, their new paper-light office practices meant that they could reduce the scale of the building by one whole floor, saving them \$26 million.<sup>20</sup>
- In 2018 the U.S. Securities and Exchange Commission (SEC) adopted a rule change allowing investment firms to offer digital reports to investors unless investors actively opt in to paper reports. Previously the SEC had required firms to send paper reports.<sup>21</sup> According to Barron’s, this change has the potential to save as

**SEC Commissioner Michael S. Piowar, who voted for the rule change on reports to investors, noted, “These documents have continued to languish on doorsteps and recycling bins in homes all across the country where their investor recipients read news online, bank online, and shop online.”<sup>26</sup>**

much as 440 million pieces of paper and an estimated 2 million trees per year, and \$2 billion in printing and mailing costs over 10 years.<sup>22</sup>

- GreeNYC, New York City’s office of sustainability, partnered with **Catalog Choice** and used tailored software to help residents opt out of junk mail. 50,000

New Yorkers used this software to opt out in 2017, rapidly growing GreeNYC's total opt-outs to 100,000, leading to significant environmental, cost, and waste management benefits for the city.<sup>23</sup>

- Europe's biggest environmental NGO, the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds took a baseline of its paper use and achieved a 22 percent reduction in just three months with simple measures like print-review and double-sided printing.<sup>24</sup>
- Lehigh University instituted a printing quota for students and made double-sided printing the default for all public printers. Staff from Library and Technology Services worked with Lehigh faculty to educate them about alternatives to requiring printing in their classes. This program resulted in an annual paper savings of 1 million pages per academic year.<sup>25</sup>

## PAPER CHOICES, NEW ALTERNATIVES

In addition to decreasing your demand for paper, remember that how the paper is made has big impact as well. More responsibly-made papers can sometimes be more expensive, but your organization's cost savings from lower paper use will offset those costs. You can use the [Canopy EcoPaper Database](#) to find North American options for Ancient Forest Friendly™ papers, and other ecopapers with recycled, FSC or agricultural residue content, including copy paper, newsprint and packaging options.

## FIGHTING THROWAWAYS

Single use paper cups and low utility items like catalogs, phone books, and paper receipts, many of which are tossed as soon as they're received, are a significant part of the waste paper problem. Starbucks alone serves 4.3 billion disposable paper cups a year worldwide that are only recyclable in a handful of cities,

using more than a million trees a year.<sup>27</sup> Computershare gave its employees in Bristol, UK reusable cups to use when they buy hot drinks.<sup>28</sup> In 2017 alone this kept 10,000 cups out of landfills,<sup>29</sup> showing the impact your organization can make on throwaways even if they're not connected to your core work. There are many throwaways to address. Production of paper receipts in the United States requires 12.4 million trees and 13 billion gallons of water and creates 1.5 billion pounds of waste and 4 billion pounds of carbon dioxide a year.<sup>30</sup> Americans receive an average of 40 pounds of junk mail per year.<sup>31</sup> It takes 4.7 million trees per year in the U.S. to print phone books.<sup>32</sup> The Environmental Paper Network and many of our member organizations, including the [Story of Stuff Project](#), [Green America](#), the [Product Stewardship Institute](#), [Stand.earth](#) and others are helping people, cities, and businesses change these wasteful practices to save resources and money. Read more about their work and opt out of throwaways at our [Paper Saving/ Paper Efficiency Project page](#).

## TISSUE

We need to make the availability of tissue and its hygienic functions more equitable. At the same time, as it is one of the fastest growing paper sectors in the world, we need to make it more sustainable. Using dispensers that allow just one paper towel or napkin at a time, for example, encourages paper saving, as does signage by dispensers that reminds people to use just what they need. This is also a critical paper choice area. U.S.-based Seventh Generation makes 100 percent recycled bath and facial tissue, with a minimum of 50 percent post consumer recycled paper. The company's approach to tissue has saved more than a million trees in the past 25 years.<sup>33</sup>

## 6 STEPS TO CREATING YOUR PAPER EFFICIENCY PLAN

1. Make paper use efficiency a priority at your organization and identify a champion to lead the effort.
2. Carry out an audit of paper procurement and use. Examine your office and production routines.
3. Identify opportunities for easy savings by encouraging and rewarding ideas from staff and partners and looking at case studies from this fact sheet, **additional case studies at the Environmental Paper Network website**, and other sources.
4. Explore how you can use **behavioral design ideas from groups like Root Solutions** in your paper saving policy, to make it easier for your teams to follow and embrace it.
5. Access other helpful resources, including:
  - The Environmental Paper Network's **Paper Calculator** to determine environmental savings.
  - **Canopy EcoPaper Database** for finding North American options for Ancient Forest Friendly™ papers, and other ecopapers with recycled, Forest Stewardship Council (FSC) or agricultural residue content.
  - The **Re-nourish Project Calculator** helps designers and others minimize waste on any print project, reducing environmental impact and saving clients money by using less paper.
  - Colleges and universities can take a look at the models for sustainable paper use at the **Association for the Advancement of Sustainability in Higher Education (AASHE) site**.
6. Plan on how you'll communicate your results to your audience. When **Climate Smart** works with companies on reducing their carbon footprint, part of the training and certification is about communicating success.<sup>34</sup>

## TRIED AND TRUE TIPS FOR SAVING OFFICE PAPER

- Post reminders to staff to remember paper saving goals and to question whether they need to print a document.
- Set computer and copier defaults to print double-sided.
- Reduce the default **width of margins**.
- Put reports and forms online rather than producing printed versions.
- Use lower weight papers.
- Invest in paper-saving technology such as e-signature services from **Adobe** and **DocuSign**; print management services like **Lexmark**, **Pharos**, and **GreenPrint**; and mailing and email management for large institutions like the **Intra-Mail Network**. Studies show a significant return on investment on average for companies using technology and services such as these.<sup>35</sup>
- Remember that paper alternatives can have sustainability impacts as well that should be informed, considered and managed with help from independent, expert sources.

## THE ENVIRONMENTAL PAPER NETWORK AND OUR GLOBAL PAPER VISION

**The Environmental Paper Network** (EPN) links organizations that share a common vision of a forest, pulp and paper industry that contributes to a clean, healthy, just and sustainable future for all life on earth. The EPN's **Global Paper Vision** outlines seven key criteria for just and sustainable paper purchasing policies:

1. reduce global paper consumption and promote fair access to paper
2. maximize recycled fiber content
3. ensure social responsibility
4. source fiber responsibly
5. reduce greenhouse gas emissions
6. ensure clean production
7. ensure transparency and integrity

See the references for this fact sheet and learn more [here](#).

(<http://environmentalpaper.org/references-for-reducing-consumption-fact-sheet/>)

*For more information, contact us:*

EPN North America  
Phone: **828-251-8558**  
Email: [info@environmentalpaper.org](mailto:info@environmentalpaper.org)  
Web: [environmentalpaper.org](http://environmentalpaper.org)  
Facebook: [facebook.com/WhatsInYourPaper](https://www.facebook.com/WhatsInYourPaper)  
Twitter: [@whatsnyourpapr](https://twitter.com/whatsnyourpapr)

