



## HOW GREEN IS PRINT? THE PRINTED PIECE VS. E-WASTE

It disturbs me when I see the following message at the bottom of an email:

 Please consider the environment before printing this email

Do those who use that tagline have any idea what they are saying? Wood and paper products are a renewable resource. Trees are a crop, just like corn or beans. I don't see anyone placing a tag on an ear of corn asking them to "consider the environment before eating". What they don't realize is that paper is biodegradable, recyclable and reusable, with nearly 60% of the paper in the U.S. being recycled.

Paper mills are dependent upon trees being there so they can be harvested and milled into paper. The paper and forest products industry plants more than 1.7 million trees everyday – that's 3 times more than what is harvested. In fact, there are 12 million more acres of forestland in the US today than there was 20 years ago. These trees take CO<sup>2</sup> out of the atmosphere, mitigating greenhouse gas emissions. It certainly sounds like the paper and forest products industries "consider the environment".

Add to that the fact that systems powering paper mills are 80-90% efficient, and the industry is one of the world's largest users of renewable, low-carbon energy, with 60% of the energy they use coming from self-generated carbon-neutral renewable resources.

On the other hand, let's look at the impact of computers on our environment:

- The plastics needed to manufacture computers are derived from fossil fuels, metals and minerals – all of which are not renewable.
- Most E-readers are manufactured in Asia, where the most common source of electricity is coal. Coal is not a renewable resource.
- Laptops and e-readers require energy to use; paper does not. Batteries must be charged.

- 70% of the electricity in the U.S., used to both charge E-readers and power electronic data centers, are generated from non-renewable fossil fuels.
- The pollution from producing an E-reader is 70 times more than the pollution from manufacturing paper.
- Paper can be recycled, but currently only 14% of electronic waste is recycled.
- Improper disposal of computers results in the release of heavy metals and toxic chemicals.

OK – hopefully I've convinced you that paper is good, but what about the nasty inks and chemicals that are used to print? Well, there is good news! 71% of printing companies use vegetable-based inks, 55% are alcohol-free, 95% recycle plates and paper, 68% measure their energy use and 70% are FSC-certified. FSC certification supports responsible forestry. Doesn't sound like an energy-sucking, environment-destroying industry to me.

How about those plastic drinking bottles that everyone loves? Plastic is not biodegradable. It also takes 1.5 billion barrels of oil each year to produce all the bottled water the U.S. loves to consume! Environmentally friendly? Cell phones contain lead, mercury, chromium and polyvinyl chlorides. Wow! What does that do to the environment?

E-waste is the fastest-growing part of our waste stream. Estimates state that 130,000 computers are disposed of every day in the U.S. and 100 million cell phones annually. So, before you add "please consider the environment before printing this email" to the bottom of your email, remember that trees are a crop grown on a farm. I don't see you bashing farmers – so why the paper and forest products industry? 