



**Paper Recycling- Right Answer To The Wrong Question**  
 How many trees do we save for every ton of recycled paper we use? Good question — one that a lot of people are asking these days. But like many good questions, this one is not easily answered.

For openers, just consider the enormous variety of tree sizes. Are you talking about "saving" a 300-year-old Douglas-fir tree, or a 20-year-old loblolly pine? The first could easily be 200 feet high and 6 feet in diameter. The latter is likely to be about 60 feet high and as wide as your waist. That's a big difference.

Another variable is the type of paper product you're talking about. Paper products vary greatly in the kind of wood fiber needed to make them. Products that demand durability and tear resistance usually require the longer and thinner wood fibers that come from pine, fir, and other softwood trees. Products that need density and printability require the shorter and thicker fibers from hardwood trees such as oak and maple. The kind of product you want influences the amount of so-called "virgin-fiber" needed to make it.

Even the question itself is driven by a more fundamental misunderstanding. Most people who are interested in "saving" trees by using more recycled paper mistakenly believe that the trees to be saved are the towering, picturesque ones commonly found in the great forests of the Pacific Northwest. In fact, these trees are not used to make paper, so they aren't "saved" when recycled material is used.

Instead, the trees typically used in papermaking are the small, pole-size trees. By removing these smaller or undesirable trees, it leaves space for other trees to grow to help insure a future supply of wood of all kinds. These are not the kind of trees that inspired Joyce Kilmer's poem to the woodsman.

Another misunderstanding may also be the root of the question. Many people believe that when paper products are recycled, no new wood fiber from living trees is used in the production process. Alas, the truth is less dramatic.

Eventually, even "recycled" paper products require new fiber. That's because with each use, paper fibers wear down during the manufacturing process, becoming smaller and less capable of binding together. For that reason, to sustain the process, it's necessary to inject a continuous infusion of never-before-recycled fiber into the wastepaper stream used to make recycled paper.

All of which isn't to suggest that recycling isn't a laudable goal. Far from it. In order to reduce the burden of waste material on the nation's landfills, paper industry officials believe recycling should be an important goal for both consumers and the paper industry.

In fact, paper producers have taken the lead in nationwide recycling efforts. Paper and paperboard today account for more than 80 percent of all post-consumer material that Americans collect for recycling. Already, the industry recovers about 27 million tons of waste paper annually to produce countless newspaper and paperboard

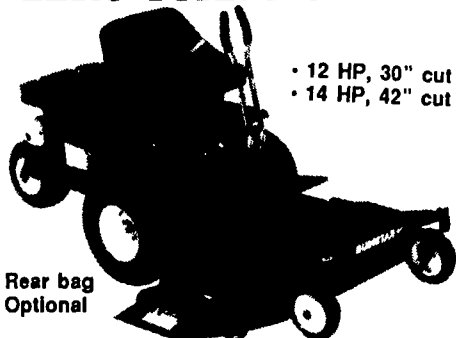
products. Papermakers have recently announced a goal to recover up to 40 percent of all used paper by 1995-up from today's 32 percent.

Industry observers concede this goal is ambitious, particularly in view of the nation's enormous appetite for paper products of every description. Last year, each American used an average of 670 pounds of paper- not surprising when you consider a few facts. Americans usually read 24 billion newspapers and more than two billion catalogs. In 1989, we also used 312 billion square feet of corrugated containers (enough to cover the state of Maryland) to ship most of the country's packaged food, clothing, appliance, and industrial products.

Even though we don't know how many trees are used in each ton of paper, industry officials do know that the trees used in papermaking are used efficiently. For example, fully 30 percent of all the raw material used in papermaking comes from forest residues, and waste wood, not from standing trees. On the West Coast, where big trees flourish, the paper industry gets two-thirds of its fiber from wood chips. Add to that total another 25 percent derived from recycled waste paper, and less than half of the raw material used to make paper comes from standing trees.



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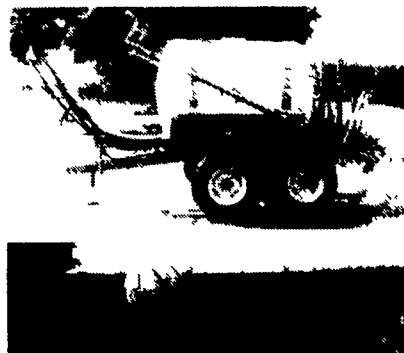
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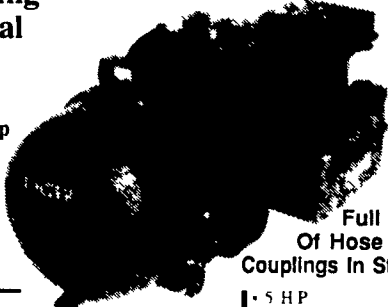
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