

Mecklenburg Audubon Society

Recycled Paper



Most brand name (Kleenex, Charmin, Cottonelle, Brawny, Scott, etc.) disposable paper products contain 100% virgin forest fiber. Much of that comes from Canada's northern (boreal) forests, a primeval expanse of pine, spruce, fir and poplar trees that nourishes caribou, lynx, bear, wolves and scores of songbirds. It is being logged at the rate of five acres a minute. The boreal forest is the breeding ground for 3 billion songbirds. Nearly half of the birds we see regularly in North America use the boreal forest for breeding or habitat.

The average North American uses 50 lbs of tissue paper products a year.

Consumer tissue, sold in supermarkets, variety stores and pharmacies, makes up about two-thirds of tissue production, yet less than 30% of these products have any recycled fiber. Commercial tissue products, which we use every day in schools, offices, hotels, hospitals, sports stadiums, airports and just about every other public venue has a very high percentage of recycled content. Why shouldn't we use this at home? If every household in the United States replaced just -

- ◇ one box of virgin fiber facial tissues (175 sheets) with 100% recycled ones, we could save 163,000 trees.
- ◇ one roll of virgin fiber toilet paper (500 sheets) with 100% recycled ones, we could save 423,900 trees.
- ◇ one roll of virgin fiber paper towels (70 sheets) with 100% recycled ones, we could save 544,000 trees.
- ◇ one package of virgin fiber napkins (250 count) with 100% recycled ones, we could save 1 million trees.

The de-inking process that turns recovered office paper into recycled fibers for use in new papers is a heavy-duty washing, scrubbing and screening process. Those office papers are dumped into huge vats, similar to several-stories-tall washing machines, where surfactants (specialized detergents) wash and scrub the papers apart.

Inks are floated to the top of the vat, where they are skimmed off. Heavier non-fiber materials in the paper (such as paper clips and staples) are swirled through centrifugal force and shoved through smaller and smaller screens to separate them from the fibers and send them out of the system as waste.

Recycled fibers are washed and scrubbed and washed and scrubbed and screened and washed again over and over before they get to the papermaking machine.

Buy paper products with recycled content -- especially post-consumer fibers. Look for products that have a high-recycled content, including high post-consumer content. Post-consumer fibers are recovered from paper that was previously used by consumers and would otherwise have been dumped into a landfill or an incinerator.

Buy paper products made with clean, safe processes. Paper products are bleached to make them whiter and brighter, but chlorine used in many bleaching processes contributes to the formation of harmful chemicals that wind up in our air and water and are highly toxic to people and fish. Look for products labeled totally chlorine-free (TCF) or processed chlorine-free (PCF). In some cases, elemental chlorine-free (ECF) may be acceptable.

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