

Responsible Paper Sourcing

Gary A. Jones, Director, EHS Affairs, Printing Industries of America

The evolution of the green has caused many print customers and printing operations to examine paper, ink, coatings, and adhesives, and how the products are manufactured. Paper is receiving the most attention. It has the most environmental impact.

A primary objective of the sustainability movement is the incorporation of renewable resources, and paper is a renewable resource. But there are issues to be considered including paper sourcing—with an emphasis on the origin of the fiber used to make the paper.

Paper Sourcing Concerns

Pressure on forests for paper production is increasing worldwide. Some forests are well-managed, but some regions of the world have illegal logging and conversion of forests with high conservation value to industrial tree plantations. And while plantations can alleviate the pressure to harvest natural forests, poorly designed and managed plantations have adverse impacts on biodiversity, climate and water resources, and traditional land uses. Seeking the forest source of origin for paper can be challenging because:

- ▶ Paper is made and shipped all over the world
- ▶ Manufacturers don't always disclose the source of their pulp
- ▶ Printers get competing claims about paper sustainability

Understanding the source of origin for the fiber is important given the passage of the recently amended U.S. Lacey Act, which makes it illegal to import or trade illegally sourced wood and paper products. The Lacey Act's requirements also apply to domestically sourced wood and paper products. The Act gives the government extensive enforcement powers and unknowingly receiving illegally sourced products can be subject to prosecution. The Lacey Act requires an import declaration for imported timber and plant products.

Paper Sourcing Considerations

Environmental stewardship for paper begins with a strong purchasing policy. Recommendations for sourcing paper products include:

- ▶ Develop a strong paper sourcing policy. Include a commitment to understanding the sources of your paper, avoiding illegal and controversial sources such as natural forests being converted to plantations, high-conservation-value forests, and areas where human rights are impacted.
- ▶ Buy from well-managed forests and post-consumer recycled sources independently certified under a credible, globally recognized system such as the Forest Stewardship Council, Sustainable Forestry Initiative, or Programme for the Endorsement of Forest Certification.
- ▶ If credibly certified paper is not available, ask your paper merchant or mill some questions, i.e., their responsible sourcing policy, their documentation about the country of origin for the fiber, how the forest was managed, and does the paper fiber originate in forest regions, such as Indonesia, with a high risk of illegal and unsustainable logging?

Summary and Conclusion

Paper has many environmental attributes to be considered when making a purchasing decision. Price should not always be the primary factor. Developing and implementing a responsible paper sourcing policy will help you demonstrate environmental leadership to your customers, stakeholders, and the marketplace, plus compliance with the Lacey Act. Working with your suppliers to achieve your sustainability goals is one of key criteria for the Sustainable Green Printing Partnership (www.sgppartnership.org), a certification program for printing operations that want to be recognized a sustainable company.