

ECOLOGICAL SUSTAINABILITY IN PAPER PRODUCTS

What do we need to know in order to make ecologically sustainable decisions as we shop for paper goods, including facial tissue, toilet paper, paper towels, paper napkins and printer paper? Our choices can reduce greenhouse gas emissions, reduce energy and water consumption and help protect vulnerable populations from toxic chemicals. Here are some things to consider:

- **Look for the highest percentage of post-consumer content.** The EPA recommends purchasing paper towels that contain at least 40-60% post-consumer recycled content and bathroom tissue that contains at least 20-60% post-consumer recycled content. 100% recycled paper uses no virgin pulp but often is a combination of post-consumer and pre-consumer content.
 - Postconsumer content is material that, instead of being thrown away after serving its initial purpose, is reused. Using post-consumer recycled content in tissue products creates a significantly smaller environmental footprint than does virgin fiber from trees because wood does not need to be harvested from a forest to be turned into pulp, and the chemicals used in its whitening process are far less toxic than those used to bleach virgin fiber pulp. (The Issue with Tissue)
 - Pre-consumer recycled content, also known as “manufacturing waste,” is made from recovered trimming scraps from in-house manufacturing operations and from previously-manufactured but unused paper products, such as printers’ over-runs or obsolete stocks. Pre-consumer content helps alleviate pressure on forests, but provides fewer benefits in terms of conserving resources or reducing waste. (The Issue with Tissue)
- **Seek out Totally Chlorine Free (TCF) products.** The type of whitening agent used is important to environmental sustainability. What impact does bleaching or whitening have on the environment?
 - Recycled paper products typically use far less toxic bleaching methods, such as processed chlorine free (PCF). This bleaching process totally avoids chlorine, instead using oxygen, ozone, and hydrogen peroxide. In addition, recycled tissue often requires less bleach overall, since many recycled fibers have been through the bleaching process once before. Where virgin products have been bleached without chlorine, they are labeled as totally chlorine free (TCF). (The Issue with Tissue)

- **Look for bamboo products that are certified by the Forest Stewardship Council (FSC).** Bamboo paper products make up a growing segment of the market. There are many good things to say about bamboo fibers, but there are some concerns too.
 - Consumers and tissue producers must use caution when purchasing products made with bamboo. Bamboo production, like the production of many alternative fiber plants, often lacks robust supply chain monitoring, and bamboo plantations are sometimes grown in recently deforested areas. Thus, producers should look for bamboo that is certified by the Forest Stewardship Council (FSC) to ensure it is sustainably sourced and indicate that certification on their products. (The Issue with Tissue)

To learn more:

- The Issue with Tissue: How Americans are Flushing Forests Down the Toilet (NRDC)
- Eco-Friendly Toilet Paper: Bamboo vs. Recycled (Treehugger)

SELF ASSESSMENT

As a congregation we have committed to implement Laudato Si', which involves our individual and collective actions and choices. Please help us understand what practices you are already doing. Are there 1-2 choices you can make this year to make your life more sustainable?