

Paper Recycling

Each month at the East Amwell Recycling Depot about 5 tons of paper are collected, which saves about 35 trees, 300,000 gallons of water, and 16 cubic yards of landfill space, using the calculations of the United States Environmental Protection Agency. If you add another 10 tons collected at curbside, we save another 70 trees.

Hurray for us.

According to the NJ DEP, recycled paper production requires between 23% to 74% less energy, 35% less water pollution, and 74% less air pollution than making virgin paper.

So, what happens to the paper you put out to recycle? When the recycled paper is picked up by the curb or at our depot, it gets taken to the Flemington Recycling Center where people sort and bale it. It then gets sold as a commodity to paper mills or to overseas buyers, such as China and India.

About half of recycled paper in this country is used for packaging. One third is exported. The rest is used to make newsprint, tissues, boxboard, and of course more paper.

For 6000 years paper has been made from recycled material, such as rags, and from non-tree sources. It's only been in the last 150 years that trees have become the resource of choice to keep up with demand. Today, 4 billion trees worldwide are cut down each year to make paper.

Paper mills would prefer to use recycled paper for their basic material because mostly it is cost effective, and they also feel pressure to be environmentally responsible. Currently, recycled paper accounts for about 38% of the world's total fiber supply.

The United States is by far the world's largest consumer of paper and but recycles only about half of that. Forty percent of all waste going to landfills is paper. Although organic, it breaks down very slowly in our compacted landfills. Researchers have retrieved forty year old newspapers from a landfill that could easily be read.

Even though communication is increasing electronically, the demand for paper has not decreased. If each of us treats our waste responsibly, hopefully we can look forward to using paper for another 6000 years.

Sande Katz, Member of the East Amwell Recycling Committee