

Wausau Paper: A Step in the “Write” Direction

A few years back, I drove through Wisconsin with a friend to go visit some friends in Appleton. Along the way, we passed by quaint, Midwestern farm towns: Eau Claire, River Falls, and Neenah. As we approached Appleton, we passed through a town called Wausau. The first thing that struck me about Wausau was the smell- the odor of the paper mills was stifling! Prior to that rude awakening, I had never smelled the exhaust of paper mills or even witnessed their production. What I saw was numerous smokestacks along a river- an industrial site amidst the farms of Wisconsin. Since this experience, Wausau Paper, the owner of the paper mills, has made commitments to the environment and the surrounding community.

How is this product green?

Wausau Paper has earned two “green” certifications for its products: the Green Seal and the Forest Stewardship Council’s certification. The Green Seal certification was given to almost two-thirds of Wausau Paper’s commercial printing and writing stock items. This gives the company the widest array of green paper products in the market.¹ The Green Seal is particularly important because it does not receive any financial incentives for approving a product. According to their website, “Green Seal provides science-based environmental certification standards that are credible, transparent, and essential in an increasingly educated and competitive marketplace. Our industry knowledge and

standards help manufacturers, purchasers, and end users alike make responsible choices that positively impact business behavior and improve quality of life.”²

The Forest Stewardship Council (FSC) granted certification for one of Wausau Paper’s lines: the “Exact Eco 100”. This certification is given to products that display support for the responsible management of forests and their resources.³ According to the FSC’s website, they work to promote “environmentally appropriate, socially beneficial, and economically viable management of the world’s forests.”⁴

Overall, 80% of Wausau Paper products are made with 30% or more of post-consumer fiber. The Exact Eco 100 product contains 100% post-consumer fiber. The increased use of post-consumer fiber reduces landfill usage by 2,250 semi-truck loads per year.⁵

In addition to Wausau Paper’s green certifications, there are other frontiers where the company is making sustainable improvements. First, all of their printing and writing papers use Elemental Chlorine-Free (ECF) pulp. This significantly reduces pollution and the leaching of dioxin into water resources. Second, extensive water management programs have been activated in order to maintain potable and process water systems and minimize consumption of water. Third, each paper mill has its own wastewater treatment facility before discharging water back into other sources. Fourth, all emissions from their various paper mills are monitored for minimal environmental impact. Fifth, waste and emissions are monitored by using the “reduce, reuse, recycle” practice. Management is in place for each of these stages to ensure that the company is reducing its ecological footprint. Lastly, energy conservation is also a goal that permeates all aspects of the company. New practices are employed at some of their paper mills, including hydroelectric energy and natural gas processes.⁶

Wausau Paper is actively involved in sustainable forestry practices. They participate in the "Green Guarantee" program through the Wisconsin state government, which focuses on promoting sustainable forestry practices. Wausau Paper's participation in the program has made them commit to reforesting 100% of the trees consumed for their products within five years of harvest completion. They have exceeded this commitment by reforesting within two years. According to Wausau Paper, sustainable forestry means "meeting the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs. It combines reforestation and the management of growing, nurturing, and harvesting trees for useful purposes. Sustainable forestry also entails conservation of soil, air and water quality, wildlife, fish habitat, and aesthetics."⁷

What happens to the paper once it is sold?

The future of the paper product is in the hands of the consumer. If the consumer does not recycle the paper after its use, it cannot continue through the ecological cycle. Non-recycling indicates that paper will not be broken down into post-consumer fiber to be reused again. After all the effort that Wausau Paper makes to produce an environmentally friendly product (considering that it is a non-sustainable product), it really boils down to the actions of the consumer. Wausau Paper realizes this and does produce documents to educate its customer about its new sustainable outlook on the paper production business. Education is the key component to continuing this cycle of reuse and Wausau Paper works with its clients to educate them on this process. Their website is a testament to educating the consumer on the sustainability of their product and the importance of recycling and reusing materials.

Why go green?

It is inspiring to see a paper company reinvent its mission to include sustainability, especially a company that produces an inherently unsustainable product. However, it was necessary for Wausau Paper to “go green” based on a few actions that counter the product of Wausau Paper. First, in a world that is fast becoming a paperless environment, and relying on wireless technology for communication, specialty paper products for writing letters are losing in sales. The increasing usage of computers and email has reduced the “art of letter writing to a minimum, and thus the usage of paper has decreased. Second, our society is becoming more “eco-conscious” every year. As society is educated on this matter, people are starting to make personal lifestyle changes, such as using less paper by printing on both sides of the paper or drinking their coffee in a commuter mug.

Despite all the changes Wausau Paper has made to its processes, it could still be more sustainable. By making all of their products consist of 100% post-consumer fiber, it gives consumers no other choice than to buy recycled paper. The company also has to be innovative and think of ways that the company can exist in the future as paper usage decreases. Catering to the “green” market and “going green” in their marketing was an intelligent business move and a step in the “write” direction.

¹ Wausau Paper, (<www.wausaupapers.com>, 2006).

² Green Seal, (<www.green Seal.org>, 2006).

³ Wausau Paper, (<www.wausaupapers.com>, 2006).

⁴ The Forest Stewardship Council, (<www.fsc.org>, 2006).

⁵ Wausau Paper, (<www.wausaupapers.com>, 2006).

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Ibid.

Bibliography

Forest Stewardship Council. 5 November 2006 <www.fsc.org>.

The Green Guarantee. 5 November 2006 <www.wipapercouncil.org>.

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