

# The SimpleLife Guide to Tree-Free, Recycled and Certified Papers

Introduction

The Fate of the Forests

By Randy Hayes

Can printing on the right paper really help the world's problems? We not only hope so - we know so. By carefully choosing fibers and manufacturing processes, you can influence the fate of the world's forests and lessen other negative impacts of paper production.

From Indonesia to Siberia, and British Columbia to Chile, wild forests are under threat from massive logging operations, as the ever-increasing demand for paper drives us further into remote areas. For paper products alone, an estimated four billion trees are cut each year, a number that could easily double within 20 years. Yet a concerted effort could, in our lifetime, lead us away from the deforestation crisis and toward the creation of a more sustainable society.

Tree-free fiber development is a vital component of what we call "preferred fibers." Preferred fibers are ones that do little or no harm to wild natural forests. They can either be wood fibers or agriculturally derived tree-free fibers. There are two types of preferred wood-based paper: paper made from 100 percent postconsumer materials and paper made from tree fibers that have been cut under strict ecological logging criteria and certified by an independent third party. Regardless of what fiber is used, however, it is important to remember that all paper production methods require pulping chemicals, consume energy and water, and generate solid waste of some sort. Whenever possible, we should do our best to reduce paper consumption and eliminate unnecessary uses of it.

Wild, naturally evolving forests are an essential component of the biosphere's life-support system. Aside from providing innumerable services to humanity, forests fulfill the vital functions of preserving wildlife habitat, stabilizing the Earth's climate, protecting watersheds, and maintaining soil productivity. They are home to many of the world's vast array of life forms. The deforestation crisis requires a surgical cut away from industrial society's increasing dependence on wood fiber from natural forests. Over time, this approach will increase the quantity and quality of forest ecosystems and enhance the vital services they provide for all Earth's inhabitants.

To that end, the Rainforest Action Network has launched a six-fold, 500-year plan to halt deforestation and its consequences. Our platform includes:

- Global forest protection, including an end to logging of ancient old-growth forests;
- Certified logging outside of ancient old-growth forests with strict criteria for maintenance of biological diversity;
- Diversified fiber supply (such as tree-free paper), relying on "waste" products wherever possible;
- Consumption reduction, especially in the over-developed nations;
- Transformation of government and corporate policy;
- Sustainable economic development based on working with nature, rather than against it.

Nature - with its ecological systems and myriad life forms - cannot speak in our design studios and print shops. The mahogany tree and the black leopard have no voice in government chambers or corporate boardrooms. It is our responsibility to speak on their behalf as best we can. We cannot ask for too much. And we had better not ask for too little. There is still time to orchestrate an “ecological U-turn,” stabilizing what remains of natural forests, yet providing for society’s paper needs. We must each aggressively do our part. If we do not, history will be justifiably unkind to us. You can take an important step today by using tree-free and preferred papers such as those featured in this guide.