

Shredding paper myths

The Paper Manufacturers Association of South Africa (PAMSA) has produced some data to support an industry often labelled as 'unfriendly' to the environment.



Contrary to popular and often misinformed belief, the fibre used to make paper products is, according to PAMSA, not sourced from the wood of rainforests, indigenous or common garden trees. The myth that printing a document will kill a tree is also perpetuated by email footnotes such as 'Please consider the environment before printing this' or 'Go green, read it on screen'.

PAMSA states that reading a document on screen produces more carbon dioxide (CO₂) than printing out the same document. A printed document can be read over again without further emissions and can also be recycled.

Forestry industry, a key player

In South Africa, 600 million trees across 762 000 hectares are specifically grown for use in pulp and paper manufacturing. Some 18 million tonnes of CO₂ are absorbed by these plantations annually. In addition to this annual absorption, there is a stock of some 180 million tonnes of CO₂ that remains stored in the un-harvested plantations, making the forestry industry a key player in fighting climate change.

According to PAMSA, if it were not for the pulp and paper industry, operating worldwide for the last 150 years, the CO₂ level in the atmosphere would be 5% higher than it is at present. This represents an approximate 0.5-degree drop in global warming. As massive sinks for atmospheric carbon, plantations reduce greenhouse gas emissions by absorbing CO₂ and releasing oxygen through the natural process of photosynthesis.

Only matured trees are harvested

In South Africa, the industry only uses about 9% of the total plantation area annually for paper manufacture and only matured trees are harvested and saplings replace each of these in the same year. Carbon absorption continues as the new trees grow and young trees are able to store carbon more rapidly than the older trees.

products are thus a renewable resource.

"There aren't many industries around that can aspire to becoming genuinely sustainable. The pulp and paper industry, however, is one of them. It is inherently sustainable," says Jonathan Porritt, former chair of the UK Sustainability Development Commission.

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