Abstract

PAPER RECOVERY: THE INDUSTRY PERSPECTIVE

by

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Early in 1990, the U.S. paper industry announced a voluntary goal to recover for recycling here and abroad 40 percent of all paper used in the nation by the end of 1995. Expected to spur the recovery of nearly 40 million tons of paper in 1995, almost 50 percent more than the 26.2 million tons already being recovered in the goal's base year 1988, achievement of this ambitious target is being fueled by industrywide investments exceeding $3 billion.

Latest industry data show the industry to be on track to achieve its widely publicized goal. Despite the difficult economic climate and a general slowing of production capacity growth, investment in paper recycling facilities by U.S. paper manufacturers are exceeding those estimates used as the basis for committing to the 40 percent recovery goal. Current industry plans for increased consumption of recovered paper between now and 1995 appear to be more than adequate to offset the slowdown in exports of recovered paper which has occurred recently.

Today, 75 percent of the more than 500 domestic paper mills recycle some recovered paper and 200 depend upon it entirely. By 1995, U.S. paper companies are expected to obtain nearly one-third of their fiber from recovered paper. Thus, marketplace and public policy matters affecting the availability and use of recovered paper have become a matter of economic well-being for the entire industry, not the special concern of any sector.

Before long, the real challenges -- not only in achieving the 40 percent recovery goal, but in looking beyond it -- are likely to be recovering enough of the right kinds of sorted recyclable paper of the quality that manufacturers will need and retaining the flexibility for papermakers, not government, to determine the best use of recovered paper. For that, the continued cooperation of government at all levels and the active participation of millions of citizens will be required.