

Chasing a paper (d)ream

Since the 1990s, the use of recycled paper has unfortunately reduced by half

- The demand for virgin paper is gobbling forests across the globe. More than 70 per cent need of the us paper industry is met from virgin forests
- The us paper producers consume one billion trees — approximately 32,000 square kilometres of forests — every year to produce nearly 330 kilogrammes (kg) of paper for every American. This implies that every American consumes almost one kg of paper every day!
- The deforestation releases carbon dioxide (CO₂), a major greenhouse gas, into the atmosphere; between 1850-1990, 120

billion tonnes of CO₂ was released

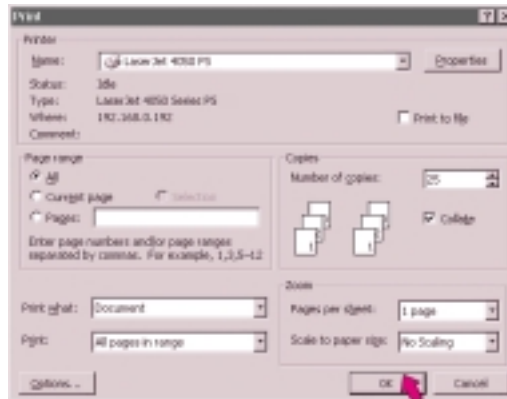
- Furthermore, the pulp and paper industry is the third-largest industrial polluter in the us and Canada, releasing more than one lakh tonnes of toxic pollutants into air, ground and water each year
- For instance, three million tonnes of chlorine is used annually to bleach wood pulp. This leads to the generation of dioxins, the known carcinogens
- In the us, paper-producing companies are also the third largest energy consumer

- The us has less five per cent of the world's population, but consumes 30 per cent of the world's paper
- Globally, pulp for paper production accounts for major wood consumption — 40 per cent in 1998. This is expected to go up to 60 per cent over the next 50 years.

■ This is likely, as worldwide paper demand will double by 2050

■ Recycling has not been able to make any dent in wood-based pulp consumption

■ According to the American Forest and Paper Association, the us papermakers recycle enough paper everyday to fill a 24-kilometre-long goods train. But activists say that a significant amount of this recycled paper is exported, rather than used



domestically (due to apprehensions about quality)

- Though the us paper industry is worth us \$230 billion, the share of recycled paper is a mere us \$20 million. In other words, less than 0.0001 per cent. The share of non-wood pulp is less than one per cent
- Worldwide, just 10 per cent paper pulp comes from non-wood sources
- Ironically, the share of recycled

paper fibre worldwide has come down from 10 per cent in 1990s to less than five per cent at present

■ The industry is not interested in investing in non-wood pulp, as it has a huge infrastructure for wood-based pulp production; innovation would indeed mean a dent in its profits

■ A new push is desperately needed. This is even more important considering the following facts: there are plenty of non-wood pulp sources. For instance, paper can be made from 100 per cent bagasse fibre

■ What's more, pulp made from such agrowaste is cheaper than wood pulp

■ Also, one hectare of hemp (fibrous plant widely grown) can produce as much useable fibre as four hectares of trees. Hemp paper is even longer lasting than wood paper, stronger and both acid- and chlorine-free. It can even be recycled seven times as against four of the wood-based paper

■ It is said that e-communication can help reduce paper consumption. But as per a recent book, *The Myth of Paperless Office*, the use of e-mails causes an average 40 per cent increase in paper consumption in offices. Reason — more information flows via emails, implying that more printouts are taken (as they are convenient to read and carry around)

■ The situation has to improve to combat the environmental problems. Non-governmental organisations can play a critical role. In Canada, they have persuaded 67 book publishers to buy their paper from forest-friendly sources. Publisher of bestseller Harry Potter is one of them