

Recycling paper really can save money

by Susan Means

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Arco knows it. So does the U.S. Air Force, the Municipality of Anchorage and a host of other businesses and organizations around town. There really is money to be made, or at least saved, by recycling waste office paper.

OPINION

Americans use an estimated 187,000 tons of paper every day. That's about 40 percent of the total volume of waste generated in this country.

Most of that paper eventually makes its way to a landfill and is forgotten — out of sight out of mind. But this approach is inefficient and, arguably, fiscally irresponsible.

It ignores the fact that most waste paper isn't really a waste at all — it's simply an untapped resource.

For businesses and other organizations, the trashing of literally tons of paper each year is a significant, albeit hidden, drain on the operating budget.

Think about it. If an organization is large enough, it pays up front to have its waste picked up and hauled to the landfill, where it pays a "tipping" fee. According to Tom Turner of the An-

chorage Recycling Center, the current cost of landfilling waste in the Anchorage area averages \$83 per ton.

To put that into perspective, an office of about 60 employees, generates about 30,000 pounds of recyclable waste paper annually. That's \$500 literally going out with the trash every year.

Even for small operations, where the cost of disposal is not so high or so obvious, landfilling waste paper is akin to throwing money away.

Recycling, on the other hand, allows businesses to exchange waste paper for hard cash and eliminate at least part of their disposal costs at the same time.

The quantity and quality of the waste paper determine just how much cash can be made, but even if the direct payback is low, the savings in "avoided costs" make recycling economically practical.

Recycling offers other benefits as well. For example, it can be an excellent public relations tool. Recent surveys show the public consistently ranks the environment as one of its highest concerns. Businesses that publicize their recycling efforts may be able to turn that concern into customer loyalty. Other recycling benefits include:

- Boosting employee morale and organizational commitment. Recycling is a noncontroversial cause everyone

can get behind.

- Offering businesses a way to put something back into the community that supports them.

- Extending the life or capacity of the local landfill, resulting in better use of our land and our tax dollars.

- Allowing us to conserve our limited natural resources.

Recycling makes good business sense for the cash it pays and the disposal costs it eliminates as well as other, more intangible benefits.

Recycling is particularly appropriate for Alaska where the high cost of doing business has always required frugality and thoughtful decision-making.

So, you're sold, you say? You want to know how you, too, can become a champion of office paper recycling? That's the easy part!

The Anchorage Recycling Center can assist you in setting up your own office Paper Recovery Program. ARC staff can help you identify the types and quantities of recyclable waste paper you generate, estimate how much it is worth, determine the best method for collecting it and make arrangements for getting it to the recycling center.

The ARC will accept virtually any kind of paper. However, certain types have a higher dollar value than others. At the top of the scale are computer paper, white and colored ledger paper,

and laser paper.

Of less value but still recyclable are chemically treated paper such as carbonless copy stock, cardboard and newspaper.

For organizations concerned about confidentiality, the ARC provides the highest level of security possible. ARC vehicles and facilities are kept locked and secure at all times to physically protect documents.

In addition, connected sheets of paper are pulled apart, randomly mixed, then sorted according to type and grade. This effectively eliminates the "information value" of documents once they become part of the paper recovery system.

The ARC recognizes that concern about confidential and proprietary information is legitimate and will structure an office paper recovery program to meet individual needs.

For most office operations, there really is money in that waste paper bin. If you would like to find out how to stop throwing it away and start collecting it, contact the Anchorage Recycling Center at 562-2267 or call the Alaska Health Project at 276-2864.

Those outside Anchorage may call 800-478-2864. All inquiries are confidential and free of charge.

Editor's Note: The Tundra Times recycles paper used in all parts of the operation of the newspaper.