

Why is Recycled Paper so Expensive?

What's the vogue trend for 2008? Going green, of course! Thanks to mass-market stores like Wal-Mart, Target, and Stop & Shop all pushing eco-friendly products, it is easier than ever before to live a more earth-conscious lifestyle. Plastic shopping bags have been replaced with canvas bags, traditional light bulbs have been replaced with energy saving alternatives, and major electronics manufacturers like GE and Kenmore have partnered with Energy Star to create resource efficient products.

The wonder is why non-green versions of any of these items are still being sold. The answer: in most examples it is still cheaper to buy traditional, non-green versions of daily items. Consider, for example, the basic writing tablet, traditionally nothing more than a block of paper bound by tape with a cardboard back piece. Over the years, the writing tablet has been a staple of students and businesses across the globe as an efficient and no-frills way to record information. Today, most large office stores sell at least one brand of recycled paper goods; however, these are still considerably more expensive than their non-green counterparts.

Office Max offers the most grotesque example of this catch-22 by selling the Second Nature brand 100% recycled materials legal pad \$13.99 for a 4-pack while charging only \$5.79 for 6 non-recycled legal pads, although the price gap narrows when you buy larger quantities. Staples provides a moderately better solution by selling their brand 100% legal pad for \$8.99/12 pads but also sells the same size pad at only 50% recycled materials for \$4.00 less.

It seems that even companies that are dedicated to providing consumers with green alternatives can't fight the numbers. According to their Web sites, Riverside Ecology and Ampad Envirortech, eco-conscious divisions of two leading paper manufacturers, sell legal pads made of 100% recycled materials at around \$13.00 per 12-pack, still 30% or more expensive than non-recycled pads. Even the Owl writing pad, made of 100% recycled paper by a company that specializes in eco-friendly office products, doesn't price any lower than \$10.69 per 12-pack.

These numbers are not comforting, and they make one wonder why - when recycling and using post-consumer goods are more affordable than ever - making eco-friendly paper is still so expensive. One possible explanation is that refining and treatment of recycled paper is more costly than traditional means of producing paper. This author welcomes answers, as do the masses that want to buy green...if they can afford to.

We are hopeful that in the near future a solution can be found to make the cost of producing 100% recycled paper products on par with traditional methods and can be easily marketed to major manufacturers and distributors. Like plastic bags, high-energy light bulbs, and resource-draining appliances, the hope is that non-recycled paper can also begin to be slowly replaced over the next five to ten years with greener, more conscious, and equally priced alternatives. This can be accomplished, in part, as more and more green entrepreneurs develop viable green and sustainable business plans.