

Reducing Environmental Impact of Paper in the Utilities & Construction Industries

Environmental Impact always comes at a cost:

At this late stage, even with fires burning in Australia it may be considered a pertinent question to answer – why should we care about the environment at all? Well there are many reasons many of which are well versed: It is essential for healthy living because pollution causes diseases damaging health; rising sea levels affect where people can live; Biodiversity is important for a wide variety of reasons one of the most important is development of new medicines; and as time goes by the problems get harder to fix and therefore pushing the problem onto our descendants.

So even if you don't care about the environment in general (or the fires burning in Australia specifically) the world will still become more polluted, biodiversity will reduce, and this may be harmful to the health of you and your family and friends.

To take one small environmental case in point. There is considerable on-going convergence in the press about the environmental impact of certain types of plastics and rightly so. Amongst many other problems they can be harmful to marine and human health as well as spoiling beaches and landscapes.

There's not so much coverage these days about the environmental impact of paper which is interesting. As people know who buy paper - paper is not an environmental free lunch, indeed it can be quite expensive in many ways apart from the cost to buy it. For example there are many other costs:

- Forests provide ideal habitats for many types of animals delivering biodiversity
- Trees act as a carbon sink converting bad (climate-changing) CO₂ to good life sustaining oxygen
- The paper-making process requires considerable water, more than three gallons¹ (about 11 Litres) per single sheet
- Chlorine and chlorine-based materials are used in manufacture
- Paper factories can cause air and water pollution
- Non recycled paper (i.e. paper pollution) goes to landfill and as paper decomposes in the ground it produces (climate-changing) methane
- Trees can help clean ground water.

Reduce Environmental Impact – Go Paperless:

Paper also has considerable hidden (and not so hidden) costs for example, the average information worker wastes an incredible 19%² of their week searching and gathering information, most of it on paper. That is about one day per week or about 50 days per year. Not to mentioned other costs e.g.: transport, Folders and labels; Ink; and maintenance costs for printer/copiers – the list goes on.

To put some real figures on this let's take an example of a field operations company with 250 people in the field, each person doing four field jobs per day each, four pages per job, and working 360 days a year. This equates to about 1.4 million paper sheets per year.

So what is the direct environmental impact of this 1.4 million paper sheets in just one year ?

- In the manufacture of this paper it would take approximately 4.3 million gallons or 16.3 million Litres of water. That is the equivalent to 6.5 Olympic size swimming pools full of life-giving potable drinking water
- That is the equivalent to 144 full grown tress, that would weigh approximately 129 Tonnes
- At 10 square meters of space for each tree that is 1.4k square meters of lost biodiversity

Sobering statistics – and this is just for one company of 250 for one year. As the company size grows these figures ramp up accordingly. So much for the paperless office.

However for many companies going paperless in the office is not the real challenge, it is going paperless in the field. So while paper may be better than plastic, it is definitely not an environmental free lunch.

In GeoPal our aim is to remove 100% of paper from the field. Since 2011 we have through use of our software:

- Eliminated over 83 million pieces of paper that is the equivalent to nearly 8.5 thousand trees saved.
- About 11 football pitches of biodiversity saved to grow these tress.
- That is the equivalent to 7.5K tonnes of wood.
- Saved nearly 1 million Cubic Meters that is the equivalent of nearly 400 Olympic pools full of water.

GeoPal

GeoPal is a Mobile Workforce Management (MWM) SaaS [Platform] Solution. We give our clients a 360 degree view of their field operations contract performance. We're providing them with daily insights into the performance of their business, helping them to increase productivity, profits, cashflow and health & safety compliance. Our 250 clients are saving a combined £65 million per year, giving them a 6 times return on their investment. GeoPal is all about Digital Transformation. Our aim is to remove 100% of paper from the field. You can't draw insights from paper, but you can draw insights when these forms are captured digitally on the mobile and the data pushed to PDF reports, dashboards and ERP systems.

(1) The Atlantic Megan Garber, June 21, 2012

(2) McKinsey Global Institute, The social economy: Unlocking value and productivity through social technologies, July 2012

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