

## Study: China recycling saves forests

But report says growing demand for wood fuels virgin timber destruction

The Associated Press

Updated: 6:15 p.m. ET July 13, 2007

BANGKOK, Thailand - China's booming recycling industry is helping to slow the destruction of forests worldwide, providing a strong market for wastepaper that mostly comes from the United States and Europe, according to a study released Friday.

But the report from the Washington-based Forest Trends also warns that despite the trees spared though the use of wastepaper, China's growing demand for wood increasingly fuels the destruction of virgin forests in parts of Asia and Africa.

About 60 percent of the fiber used to manufacture paper and paper board products in China is derived from wastepaper, the report found. In the last decade, China's wastepaper imports increased by more than 500 percent — from 3.4 million tons in 1996 to 21.6 million tons in 2006 — with most of that growth occurring between 2002 and 2006.

The industry includes one of the country's richest people, Zhang Yin, the founder of the Nine Dragons Paper Co. Her fortune was made from turning recycled paper from America into packaging products.

Brian Stafford, the lead author of the report and an industry consultant, said China is by far the world's biggest consumer of wastepaper and that in the last four years alone, it has prevented 71.6 million tons of wastepaper from heading to landfills in the U.S., Japan, and Europe.

### **Future concerns persist**

Just last year, China's use of wastepaper instead of trees to make paper products probably saved 59.5 million tons of wood from being harvested for pulp.

But Stafford said China continues to depend on virgin forests for its higher-quality paper, sourcing nearly 40 percent "of wood and wood pulp from countries where good forest management cannot be assured."

"The biggest environmental challenge related to China's paper industry is to prevent its growing demand for fiber from driving ever more forest destruction in places like Indonesia and eastern Russia," he said. "Wastepaper can only provide so much fiber, and with huge new

pulp mills coming on line in China, there is a legitimate concern that future growth in China's paper industry is going to happen at the expense of already stressed natural forests in the tropics."

A spokesman for the Chinese government could not be immediately reached for comment. The report comes amid growing concern from environmental groups who accuse China of importing illegal timber to supply its flooring and furniture industry. In April, Greenpeace accused the country of importing illegal tropical hardwood from Papua New Guinea and Indonesia last year to supply its booming furniture industry and produce luxury goods for overseas markets.

Greenpeace said it found that Chinese importers were evading an Indonesian ban on the hardwood known as merbau by labeling it as sawn timber. Importers also used forged documents which claimed the logs came from Malaysia, despite the fact that much of the merbau has already been logged out of the Southeast Asian country.

**Positive development**

A member of Greenpeace is on Forest Trends' board, and Greenpeace China's Forests Campaign Coordinator, Tamara Stark, agreed with the Forest Trend report's findings.

"We agree with their findings that it's really positive that Chinese companies have shown entrepreneurial spirit in taking on the issue of recycling and the production of new recycled products," said Stark.

To make the industry more sustainable, Forest Trends recommends Chinese paper companies establish a system allowing them to track wood all the way back through the supply chain to ensure it comes from legal sources.