

ENVIRONMENTAL PROJECTS



Green Tip: Impact of Paper Products on the Environment

The production and disposal of paper products places several burdens on the environment. Deforestation, air and water pollution from pulp mills, high energy and water use in production and recycling, and consumption of landfill space are notable environmental issues that arise from paper use. We can mitigate these problems both by reducing the amount of paper we consume and by making informed choices about what kinds of paper we buy. Using reusable bags instead of paper (or plastic) bags, using cloth napkins and towels, and purchasing products made from recycled paper are a few examples of simple changes we can make.

The use of paper plates during picnics or big parties where washing and avoiding breakage of ceramic plates would be inconvenient may raise the question: what is the environmental impact of using paper plates? Determining whether using paper plates is better for the environment than running a dishwasher load that consumes electricity and water is a difficult task.

Using the dishwasher requires water, detergent and electricity. Using paper plates requires raw materials, manufacturing and delivery, and disposal. Using porcelain plates with the dishwasher wins out because of their potential for reuse. Making enough **paper for one plate uses about 8 gallons of fresh water**, which means your 10-plate dinner party uses 80 gallons, without washing a thing. Running the dishwasher for one load uses much less water, between six and 10 gallons.

The carbon emissions from manufacturing a paper plate are small compared to porcelain. However, paper plates need to be made each time they are used, in addition to transportation from the factory to the dinner table. Assuming you use your porcelain plates for at least a year and run the dishwasher sparingly, porcelain plates are the greener choice.

More information can be found at:

<http://www.stanfordalumni.org/news/magazine/sage/201101/paperplates/nittygritty.html>

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