

More paper can be recycled - PRASA

Despite increased awareness around the importance of recycling, large amounts of recoverable paper and board packaging are still unnecessarily dumped in landfill sites.



According to statistics released by the Paper Recycling Association of South Africa (PRASA), the 1 151 315 tons recovered in 2012 equates to 57,3% of paper that can be collected and recycled compared to 58,2% in 2011. The slight dip can be attributed to an overall increase of paper and paper board consumption.

"There is so much more that can be done, not only to preserve our environment, but to create sustainable employment and alleviate poverty through recycling," says Ursula Henneberry, PRASA operations director. "Recoverable paper has value. From policy makers and government to the private sector and ordinary family member, we need to see recyclable material as a resource," says Henneberry.

Working with government

In the paper industry, 65% of recovered paper is used as an alternative raw material in the manufacturing process. "Many people cannot get a job in the mainstream economy because of their low level of education or age," notes Henneberry. "Waste pickers earn a modest living from collecting and selling recyclables; however, they are faced with a number of challenges." They are often considered a nuisance as they go around with their trolley carts, and pose a significant risk on the roads. "We need to find a way of working with government, especially at local level, as well as the private sector to formalise their work and make it safer and more dignified."

PRASA, with the financial assistance of the Fibre Processing and Manufacturing Sector Education and Training Authority (FP&M Seta), offers a four-day entrepreneurship training course to assist aspirant entrepreneurs and unemployed individuals to set up and manage sustainable paper recycling and recovery ventures. Presented free of charge, the course covers content such as paper sorting and recycling, business skills development and financial management. The training programme has to date reached more than 300 people at its main centres as well as in Lephalale, Upington, Potchefstroom and Matatiele.

Trees are not saved

'Graduates' include a number of beneficiaries at the Cato Manor 'Udondolo' cooperative in KwaZulu-Natal, a community-based project which sees people make a living out of recycling and reusing. The cooperative has grown from 15 to 23 people, ranging in age from 23 to 72. Three beneficiaries have transferred skills onto others, boosting the reach of the project. In addition to the glass, plastic, newspaper and cardboard that they initially collected, they now also gather milk and juice cartons, white paper and plastic bottles.

"We need to banish the notion that recycling paper saves trees," notes Henneberry. "In South Africa, paper is produced from plantation grown trees. Such trees are sustainably farmed for this very purpose, so do not need 'saving'." She adds that the forestry sector plants in excess of 262,000 trees every day. Only 9% of the total plantation area is harvested annually.

South Africa consumed 2,6-million tons of paper, including newsprint, printing and writing grades, corrugated materials, board and tissue in 2012. Some 2,4-million tons was manufactured locally, 864,000 tons imported and 605,000 tons exported.

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