

Collaboration: Key To Good Model Of Environmental Responsibility

By Paul T. Robbertz
VP, Environment, Health and Safety
Pitney Bowes Inc.

A global group of stakeholders agree that change is needed to combat rising levels of greenhouse gases in the earth's atmosphere. With forthcoming regulation aimed at reducing these gases and the convening of world diplomats in Copenhagen for a global climate agreement this year, change is coming, whether it is welcomed or not.

With increased scrutiny on carbon emissions, all industries need to take action now to reduce their environmental footprint. If mailers wait for change, control over decisions that impact mail design, manufacturing and delivery may be taken away. So, why wait to collaborate on a strategy that benefits the environment and the overall mailing industry?

Several forums already exist within the mailing industry where businesses, government, and non-government organizations can work together toward this goal. These include the Postal Service's Greening of the Mail Task Force, the Direct Marketing Association's Committee for Environment and Social Responsibility, and the soon-to-be-launched Green Seal Mailer Partnership.

With the help of these groups, individual organizations, and the U.S. Postal Service, research has already been done to deliver a baseline assessment of mail's environmental impact throughout its entire lifecycle. In fact, several studies provide mailers with a better understanding of how the carbon emissions associated with the mailing industry compare to other human activities and industries.

These studies conclude that the carbon footprint for a single piece of mail is less than 50 grams of CO₂, a fraction of the environmental footprint from most everyday activities. In addition, the U.S. Postal Service's life cycle analysis showed that running a coffee maker at home for an hour each day is the carbon equivalent of all the mail a typical person receives in one year. Overall, these studies

show that the mailing industry accounts for roughly 0.5 percent of all greenhouse gas emissions in the U.S.

In spite of the mailing industry's low carbon footprint, claims by advocacy groups about mail's impact on the environment are uniformly negative or based on environmental misperceptions. Most of the more critical claims about its impact are focused on reducing the flow of mail, either through individual action or Do Not Mail legislation. This legislation has not been approved in the 19 states that have considered it over the past three years, but its threat should be enough to move mailers to communicate the value of mail, to identify areas for further improvement and to participate in industry-wide environmental programs.

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Assess Environmental Impact

One of the first steps in becoming an environmentally-conscious mailer is assessing the carbon emissions associated with the mail piece. A mailer can take advantage of the eco-wise carbon calculator solution, which takes a comprehensive approach in measuring the carbon footprint of a mail piece.

This calculator includes analysis of the mail piece design, the amount and types of materials used, efficiency of equipment and the types of transportation and distances driven. By analyzing this information using the carbon calculator, mailers can find new opportunities to consolidate mail pieces, run more efficient operations and reduce green-

house gas emissions.

In addition, the Direct Marketing Association offers a variety of planning tools for members to consider when developing internal environmental goals and policies. Using the DMA's environmental planning tool, a mailer can focus on a single area in which to make improvement, set goals and build from there, or take a more comprehensive approach. Regardless of how it is used, this tool provides greater awareness of the breadth and complexity of the environmental issues facing mailers.

Identify Areas For Environmental Improvement

There are three areas within the lifecycle of mail that

have been identified by industry groups as focus areas for environmental improvement. Paper has been shown to be the largest contributor to the total environmental impact of mail while printing accounts for a smaller portion, but is a large contributor nonetheless. In addition, although the amount of waste generated by mail is small, its recycling rate lags behind other paper-based products. Increasing mail recycling is the third area within the lifecycle of mail that needs improvement.

Although the U.S. paper industry already plays an important role in reducing greenhouse gas emissions by replanting more trees than it harvests, mailers must use their collective power to influence the paper industry's support of sustainable forests and environmentally responsible paper procurement and manufacturing processes. In fact, the mailing industry's environmental leadership in this area can and should drive an increase in worldwide attention and demand for sustainable forestry and paper recycling.

Several different certification programs exist to help mailers fulfill their commitment and participation in sustainable forest management. The Sustainable Forestry Initiative (SFI), the Forest Stewardship Council (FSC), the American Tree Farm Systems and the Canadian Standards Association set standards for forest certification in North America.

Green Groups

1. U.S. Postal Service's Greening of the Mail Task Force
2. Direct Marketing Association's Committee for Environment and Social Responsibility
3. Green Seal Mailer Partnership.

These organizations trace wood from forest operations through the supply chain using a tracking system commonly referred to as 'chain of custody'. Labels on product packaging help identify paper or finished paper products that use this tracking system. Both the SFI and the FSC also provide assurance that wood from non-certified forests are at a minimum, harvested legally and from areas not considered ecologically sensitive.

Forums also exist to provide procurement groups with a base of knowledge from which to evaluate criteria in sourcing paper products. The Environmental Paper Assessment Tool (EPAT) is a good example as an effective mechanism to help organizations select paper products that are environmentally sound while considering the end-user's performance requirements.

In addition to using paper made from a certified forest, mailers could use recycled paper and lower grade paper stock whenever feasible. Environmentally preferable paper qualities is one area outlined by the U.S. Postal Service in a recently launched initiative called 'environMAILism'.

Another area identified in this initiative includes the printing of the mailpiece. Some suggestions for mailers in this area include use of agri-based inks, varnishes and dyes; printing on both sides of the paper; and collaborat-

ing with transport facilities to print closer to the end destination, among others. More information on this program can be found in the 2008 July/August issue of *MailPro*, available on the USPS website.

Making environmentally-conscious decisions in the creation and printing of mail influence its recyclability. Current recycling rates for catalogs and direct mail lag behind recycling rates for other types of used paper and paperboard, such as newsprint and corrugated cardboard. Although part of the problem is in the lack of availability of recycling services and misperceptions about identity theft, another big part is lack of consumer awareness that all paper-based mail is recyclable.

Participate In Industry-wide Environmental Programs

Mailers have an obligation to help increase the recovery and recycling of mail by communicating with customers about the benefits of doing so. Several industry programs help mailers encourage mail recycling. These include the 'Recycle Please' or 'Please Recycle' campaigns from the Direct Marketing Association, Magazine Publishers of America, and the Envelope Manufacturers Association. These programs ask mailers to display a recycling logo or messages on their catalogues and direct mail pieces.

Another program from the DMA that helps mailers assess and improve their environmental performance is the "Green 15" environmental scorecard. The DMA's scorecard asks members to establish internal and measurable benchmarks to improve environmental performance in five key areas. These include: 1) list hygiene and data management; 2) design; 3) paper procurement and usage; 4) printing and packaging; and 5) recycling and pollution reduction. The DMA also provides tips and strategies to help mailers achieve a reduced environmental impact in these areas.

For example, in the list hygiene and data management area, the DMA offers ways to better target mail pieces, validate delivery points, and practice list and address hygiene to meet USPS standards.

By practicing some of these suggested techniques, direct marketers help reduce the amount of undeliverable-as-addressed mail or duplicate mail, which conserves natural resources while making mail operations more efficient. Strategies and tips listed in the other four areas provide similar solutions to help reduce the amount of greenhouse gases emitted by mailers.

As mentioned, there are several industry-wide programs that provide mailers with opportunities to expand their environmental stewardship efforts. The 'Green 15' from the DMA, the 'environMAILism' initiative from the Postal Service, USPS Greening of the Mail Task Force and the soon-to-be launched 'Green Seal Mailer Partnership Program' are just a few examples. If mailers take advantage of these multi-stakeholder forums and groups, they will ensure a sustainable model of environmental responsibility for the overall mailing industry -- while the freedom to do so still exists.