

Monday, September 16, 2011

Wood – One of the Earth's Natural Resources

Growing up in the seventies, I can remember being encouraged to use less paper. We often heard comments like “How many trees did they kill to print that?” I still hear these same comments today. We were and still are made to feel conscious about our use of paper as it related to the over-utilization of trees. I think we should be focusing more on responsible use of wood and paper and recycling the products we use, rather than advocating the reduction of their use.

Forestry experts have documentation saying we are growing far more trees than we are using today for paper and wood products. Pictures of local areas around 1900 show fields of barren of trees. Wood was widely utilized in construction of housing, commercial structures, bridges, and even automobiles. While we were aggressively using wood, the organized efforts of forest management we know today had not begun.

We shouldn't feel bad about using or purchasing products made from wood. Dr. Wayne Clatterbuck, UT Extension Forester, advocates the increased use of wood. Wood is a truly renewable resource, unlike aluminum, plastic, concrete, or steel. Wood is also recyclable and biodegradable.

Consider these points offered by Clatterbuck:

- The energy required to grow a tree is the sun. As trees grow, they remove carbon dioxide from the air and give off oxygen.
- Wood manufacturing processes consume only 4 % of the energy used by all primary industrial raw material manufacturers compared to 56% for steel and concrete.
- If the energy required to manufacture a 4 pound block of wood had been used to make aluminum, the resulting piece would weigh 1 ounce.

According to Clatterbuck, the average per capita use for wood is 4 pounds per day. The average American uses 3.5 times as much. Remember wood is a renewable, recyclable, and biodegradable resource.

It is estimated that wood consumption will double in the next 30 years. However, we are constantly seeing negative news about the harvest of trees. Forested land is increasingly being converted to other uses than remaining in forests. Clatterbuck leaves us with the question, “Where will we get our daily wood?” I think we should be teaching our children to use wood products and paper in a responsible way instead of teaching them that using paper is killing trees.