

Are Children's Publishers Destroying Rainforests?

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Do children's publishers deserve to wear green hats—or black ones? After all, it's tricky to make good-looking four-color picture books from recycled paper, or affordable ones from virgin paper that is certified as eco-friendly. The cost issue sends publishers to Asia, where paper and materials are cheaper. The problem: printers there may use fiber from Indonesian rainforests.

In a [recent report](#), the Rainforest Action Network said most of the top 10 children's publishers have released at least one picture book containing paper fiber linked to the destruction of Indonesian rainforests. All 18 children's books in RAN's test included materials from existing tropical forests or from plantations run on razed rainforest land. "Our end game for our campaign is to get overseas printers to eliminate Indonesian suppliers and Indonesia fiber from the papers they buy for their printing," said Lafcadio Cortesi, forest campaign director for RAN. "We're asking publishers to specify in their contracts with their printers that they cannot use paper from endangered forest fiber." About half of all glossy four-color children's books are printed overseas, Cortesi said.

For their part, children's book publishers say they are making great strides to be green. This coming winter, the Book Industry Environmental Council plans to introduce a book jacket eco-label (similar to the Good Housekeeping seal of approval). Books will only carry the "certified green publisher" seal if they contain no endangered forest fiber. Similar to the LEED green building certification program, the new system would contain three tiers, which would depend on 22 different environmental metrics, including ink, distribution, and return rate.

Some environmentalists and publishers think RAN focuses too narrowly (and too negatively) on rainforest fibers rather than considering other social and environmental factors. "Responsibility is the measure," said Joshua Martin, director of the Environmental Paper Network, which represents more than 100 groups working together to accelerate social and environmental change in the pulp and paper industry.

Still, he agrees with RAN's basic message that publishers should not use rainforest materials. "I don't think anyone should be using controversial fiber from controversial sources because there are so many alternatives out there," he said. For example, it's possible to make paper from agricultural residues, such as sugar cane.

"There are a lot of nuances to this issue," said Tyson Miller, director of the Green Press Initiative. U.S. publishers are making greater strides than the RAN report might indicate, he believes. Miller estimated that about 15 to 20 percent of fibers in all U.S. books today are recycled—up from 13.3 percent in 2007 and just 2.5 percent in 2004. He also noted that whereas nearly half of German publishers use tropical hardwood fiber in their books, only about 5 percent of U.S. publishers do. "That's a sign of progress that wasn't talked about," said Miller. "I see all that the industry has been doing."

In its report, RAN doesn't distinguish between Indonesian fiber from rainforests vs. Indonesian fiber from old vs. new plantations. (Plantations tend to just grow acacia trees.) "They're simplifying the message now and saying, 'Nothing from Indonesia,'" said Miller. "The hard part is do you know when that plantation was established? If U.S. publishers are getting that fiber from plantations established 10 years ago and nothing new was established, that's completely in line with what the Rainforest Action Network was promoting [in the past]."

RAN's Cortesi is upset that companies continue to convert natural forests—with 90 to 200 different species of tree every couple of acres—into one-crop plantations. "The plantation fiber is helping to drive the destruction of the natural forests," he said. "The plantation fiber is part of a system of overall rainforest destruction." It also leaves a huge carbon footprint, he contends, because of massive carbon releases when peat lands are destroyed.

Publishers note that being rainforest-friendly is only one component of being green. Houses such as Scholastic are trying to use less paper, to use recycled paper and to use more paper certified by the Forest Stewardship Council, which ensures that paper comes from companies that manage their lands responsibly and pay attention to biodiversity and worker rights. By 2012, Scholastic, already considered to be a green publisher, plans to make sure that 30 percent of its paper purchases are FSC certified and that 25 percent of its fiber is "recovered." Also, it works with its mills to create lighter grades of paper that look the same as heavier ones. For example, a 50-pound paper might go down to 45 pounds. It also makes its summer catalog on smaller, thinner paper. It recycles some of its returns into donation programs. And it uses only nontoxic inks.

Technology has made recycled paper look surprisingly good. "They've come a long way in the last 20 years," said Lisa Serra, director of paper procurement for Scholastic, co-chair of the eco-label committee of the Book Industry Environmental Council. "It looks a lot better than when you used to have paper with lots of flecks in it, and you couldn't tell if it was a period or the paper." (Back then, proofreaders circled those dots, said Francine Colaneri, v-p of manufacturing and corporate purchasing for Scholastic.)

The degradation and destruction of tropical rainforests—mostly to get palm oil and wood for publishing—is responsible for 15 percent of annual greenhouse emissions, according to RAN. The group also noted that the resulting carbon footprint has turned Indonesia into the third-largest global greenhouse gas emitter, behind the United States and China. "They're not coming from transportation or burning of energy. They're coming from deforestation," said RAN's Cortesi. It releases carbon trapped in the soil. "Plantations don't absorb the carbon from the atmosphere as quickly or efficiently as natural forests," he said.

In a separate release, RAN suggested 25 rainforest-friendly titles, including H.A. Rey's *Curious George Plants a Tree* (printed on paper certified by the FSC with soy ink) and Dr. Seuss's *The Lorax* (printed on 100 percent post-consumer recycled paper).

Why not 100 percent FSC, or 100 percent recycled paper? "There's not enough FSC capacity for every single publisher to have every single paper printed on it," said Serra. And despite improvements in quality, it's still difficult to make high-end, four-color books out of recycled paper. "You could use 10 percent recycled, possibly 20 percent recycled, but when you get any higher, most mills cannot make that fancy sheet with more recycled fiber," Serra added. "It can lessen the strength."

Buyers can look for books printed in the United States since—unlike books printed in China—they never use Indonesian fibers. "If you look for books manufactured in North America, you know you're not going to be impacting Indonesian forests," said Miller. "You can be sure it's a much greener book. It's also not traveling all of those miles."

But some books published in Asia are environmentally correct, too. "Even though we may do some manufacturing overseas, we are still requiring our vendors to provide paper that meets controlled wood standards," said Colaneri. "You couldn't just look and say, 'This is printed in China or Singapore, and therefore it does not meet the standard.'"

Scholastic already told its vendors it would prohibit sourcing from Indonesia and tropical forests and from Asian Pulp & Paper Co. and Asia Pacific Resources International Limited. In the future, Scholastic also plans to randomly test books to verify the paper source. (Despite a moratorium on all new logging in tropical forests in Indonesia, illegal logging is common, Miller said.)

Will readers be willing to pay extra for books with green seals? Maybe. "You have to somehow marry consumer awareness with elevation of price," said Kenny Brechner, owner of DDG Booksellers in Farmington, Maine. He applauds publishers for "trying to do something about this low-priced paper that's bad for the environment." Many consumers will shell out an extra dollar for a book, he said, "because it's on paper that's not destroying the rain forest."

Children's book publishers say they are hardly ignoring the environment. In the fall of 2008, Simon & Schuster launched Little Green Books. The 20-book collection uses soy and vegetable inks, mostly FSC-certified paper and 100 percent recyclable paper. The titles are especially popular with mom bloggers, says Julie Christopher, senior marketing manager, licensed and novelty publishing at S&S Children's Publishing.

Hachette Book Group, which began working on sustainability issues more than two years ago, prints most of its books in North America. As it increases its amount of recycled and FSC-certified paper, the company is controlling costs in other ways, such as reducing the number of paper types it uses. How will it make customers aware of its eco-friendliness? "There are lots of options to consider, from calling out the specific percentage of recycled paper in a book to prominent placement of an FSC logo," says Pete Datos, v-p of the Hachette Book Group and chair of the Book Industry Environmental Council. "We are also looking forward to the launch of the Book Industry Environmental Council's eco-label, which will hopefully standardize some of the consumer communication across the whole book industry."

Still to be determined: whether paper books or electronic ones are better for the environment. After all, books are made from trees—but they biodegrade. The Green Press Initiative takes no formal position on which is more environmental—paper books or e-books. "There hasn't been a really comprehensive lifecycle analysis where we feel the right comparison has been established," said Miller. With e-books, "where have the heavy metals been mined from?" he asked. "Do they have an after use?" Many heavy metals are mined in the Congo basin, he said. How long will the electronic devices last? "Environmental issues can't just boil down to climate," said Miller. It's bad news, he added, "if you've got a device where the materials are mined from areas with social conflict or no infrastructure to recycle it except sending it to China." Paper books can be surprisingly green. "If you have a high degree of recycled paper, then you are supporting jobs, recovering materials."

Like the Green Press Initiative, RAN is "agnostic" on e-books vs. paper books, Cortesi said. "We do not understand the environmental footprint of Kindles and iPads yet. They're very complicated. They're made of many different materials. We don't know how quickly they break down." What he does know: "If they're going to read on paper, it should be good paper."

That's easier to do with text-only books than with picture books. In 2007, Scholastic announced that all 12 million copies of the U.S. edition of *Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows* would be printed on paper containing a minimum of 30 percent post-consumer waste fiber and 65 percent of the paper used in the first U.S. printing would be certified by the FSC. It was the largest purchase of FSC-certified book for the printing of a single book title.

Other publishers are making positive strides. Candlewick Press's parent company, Walker Books, belongs to the Publishers' Database for Responsible Environmental Paper Sourcing. This database, set up by 19 U.K. publishers, will award a grade of one to five stars based on the Egmont Grading System—which considers whether material

has been legally harvested or recycled and how the forest sources have been managed. Disney Publishing Worldwide now mandates that all of its suppliers use only material certified by the FSC, the Sustainable Forestry Initiative or the Programme for the Endorsement of Forest Certification.

Despite RAN's negative report, Cortesi isn't condemning publishers. "Most of the publishers have come out and said they care about these issues," he said. "What we want to see is that they all act on it quickly and decisively."

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