

FACT SHEET

CHARMIN'S TOILET PAPER— THIN SUSTAINABILITY CLAIMS

Charmin is America's leading toilet paper brand, but it's at the back of the pack when it comes to sustainability. In fact, Charmin has received an F on NRDC's 2019 and 2020 forest sustainability report cards for toilet paper. Its forest-unfriendly production is funneling the world's trees into consumers' toilets, driving an unsustainable "tree-to-toilet pipeline."

Charmin, made by home goods giant Procter & Gamble, contains zero recycled content, meaning it is produced entirely with virgin fiber sourced from trees, many of them from the largest intact forest left in the world: Canada's boreal forest. Nearly half of all Procter & Gamble's tissue materials come from Northern Bleached Softwood Kraft (NBSK) pulp, which overwhelmingly comes from the Canadian boreal forest.¹ The use of this forest for products like Charmin is having a devastating impact on Indigenous Peoples, wildlife, and the global climate.

Procter & Gamble has a lot of messaging on its website that obfuscates the environmental impacts of its flagship toilet paper brand.² But substantively, Charmin's claims of environmental sustainability are toilet paper-thin. In October 2020, P&G's shareholders took decisive action to address the company's impact on forests, overwhelmingly voting in favor of a resolution urging the company to report on steps it is taking to eliminate deforestation and intact forest degradation from its supply chain. In this shareholder rebellion, investors gave a clear directive to address the impacts it is having on Canada's boreal forest and other forests around the world. Yet, in the wake of this historic vote, P&G has deferred any meaningful action and instead doubled down on its misleading rhetoric. We're here to correct some of the brand's most egregious myths.

MYTH: *"For every tree we use, we plant two more."*

FACT: This claim is both misleading and obfuscates the real impacts of their sourcing practices. Procter & Gamble may, in fact, require its suppliers to replant trees. But they do not disclose whether they replant trees in the areas where their suppliers log, nor whether they ensure that the replanted trees grow back. In fact, recent research in the boreal shows that in many places the forest does not grow back, leaving treeless scars on the landscape that persist for decades.³ Furthermore, clearcutting, which involves logging nearly all the trees in an area and is the method used in 90 percent of logging operations in Canada, changes the fragile balance of these complex ecosystems, causing permanent damage to forests that replanting does not fix.⁴ Often, animals like the boreal caribou do not return to regrown clearcuts because these areas lack the ecological and structural complexity of intact forests. Furthermore, clearcutting in the boreal forest releases enormous amounts of carbon dioxide stored in its soils, and erodes the forest's ability to absorb carbon from the atmosphere.⁵ The climate ramifications can persist for centuries, even when trees are replanted.⁶ At a moment when we have only a matter of years to prevent truly catastrophic climate change,⁷ it's critical to keep forests intact—no matter how many saplings P&G may be prepared to plant.

CHARMIN ULTRA TOILET PAPER		
RECYCLED CONTENT	X	
TOXIN-FREE BLEACH	X	
SUSTAINABLE	X	
GRADE	F	



MYTH: *“100% of the pulp we source is certified by a leading third-party certification system, which ensures...no deforestation, protecting biodiversity, respecting the rights of Indigenous Peoples, and protecting endangered species.”⁸*

Fact: The only forestry certification with robust environmental standards in Canada is the one awarded by the Forest Stewardship Council (FSC), which has recently updated its criteria to incorporate more meaningful boreal caribou habitat protections and greater recognition of Indigenous rights.^{9,10} Procter & Gamble claims that all the certification standards it relies on, including the industry-led Sustainable Forestry Initiative (SFI) and the Programme for the Enforcement of Forest Certification (PEFC) offer sufficient guarantees of sustainability in pulp sourcing. But SFI and PEFC requirements both contain glaring loopholes that seriously undermine sustainable forestry.¹¹ In addition, Charmin is FSC-Mix certified, a less robust classification that means it may contain pulp from operations that have destroyed critical boreal caribou habitat and intact forests,



or pulp that has been obtained without the free, prior, and informed consent of Indigenous Peoples. And crucially, certification (from any system) does not reduce the overall pressure throwaway tissue products are placing on forests and our climate.

MYTH: *“We keep forests as forests.”*

Fact: United Nations definitions of “deforestation” characterize it as “the direct human-induced conversion of forested land to non-forested land,”¹² but this emphasis on land use change does not encompass many of the ways in which logging harms forests. For example, clearcutting a forest may not convert it into a parking lot, so the razed land may technically still be considered a “forest,” but it can cause species to become locally extinct, pollute water and air, and release carbon stored in forests’ trees and soils.¹³ When we consider the carbon and species values of the world’s last intact forests, they are irreplaceable in our lifetimes. Charmin’s role in driving the clearcutting of intact boreal forests, therefore, is causing irreparable harm to one of the world’s most important carbon storehouses and species refuges.

MYTH: *“We use paper from a variety of sources... including fast-growing trees, like Eucalyptus, which helps quickly and sustainably replenish supply.”*

Fact: Charmin does source some materials from eucalyptus plantations, but it also purchases a substantial amount of pulp from intact forests, including Canada’s boreal forest, which are anything but fast-growing. Moreover, while some sustainable alternative fibers do exist, eucalyptus is not one of them. Eucalyptus tends to be highly invasive, destroying native species and drastically altering ecosystems wherever it is planted.¹⁴ It is also not necessarily sustainably grown. Many eucalyptus plantations require first clearcutting intact forests.

MYTH: *“Canada is a world leader in sustainable forest management.”*

Fact: While Canada has cultivated a strong international reputation as an environmental leader, its forestry practices are nowhere near sustainable. Between 2000 and 2013, Canada lost the most intact forest of any nation in the world, save for Brazil and Russia.¹⁵ Each year, Canada clearcuts more than a million acres of its boreal forests, equal to roughly the size of a small city block per minute.¹⁶ The federal government and the provinces have largely failed to implement key environmental protections, including the Species at Risk Act, driving threatened species like the boreal caribou ever closer to extinction.¹⁷

MYTH: *“Goals by 2030: Achieve Carbon Neutrality by 2030.”*

Fact: While Procter & Gamble announced in 2020 a climate goal to achieve climate neutrality by 2030, if you read the fine print you will find this goal encompasses only a small fraction of their emissions.¹⁸ Its commitment to achieve carbon neutrality by 2030 addresses only its Scope 1 and 2 emissions, which are emissions from its own facilities and the third parties from whom it purchases energy.¹⁹ It does not encompass Scope 3 emissions, which include the upstream and downstream climate impacts of, for example, logging trees for toilet paper. Furthermore, it’s especially problematic that the company’s plan to achieve carbon neutrality for its operational emissions touts the benefits of “natural climate solutions,” all while the company continues to source from one of the planet’s most important carbon storehouses, the Canadian boreal forest.²⁰

If Procter & Gamble truly wants to make its toilet paper sustainable for forests and the global climate, it has no choice but to reduce its consumption of virgin forest fiber and stop sourcing from intact forests. Ultimately, Charmin still sends trees from invaluable forests like the boreal to an ignoble fate in our bathrooms, perpetuating a highly destructive tree-to-toilet pipeline. Rather than resting on questionable laurels, the brand should become a true climate leader, adapt to the environmental crises we are facing in the 21st century, and embrace existing solutions by incorporating recycled content into its products. Anything less is wasteful, outmoded, and unacceptable.

ENDNOTES

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