

# Environmental Impact Associated with Unsolicited Mail

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## INTRODUCTION

The project was formulated in collaboration with the campaign "Reklamer Ja Tak" and the purpose of the project is to study how unsolicited mail affects the environment.

A study was conducted based on three environmental myths, in which The Graphic Association of Denmark's (GA) environmental campaign was based on. The aim is therefore to study the validity of the 3 myths about the environment and unsolicited mail as well as the related claims. Additionally the environmental effect of the electronic alternatives were studied. Furthermore the environmental impact from unsolicited mail and that from the electronic alternatives were compared, in order to assess whether there is an environmental benefit by using the electronic alternatives.

The three aspects discussed in connection with the three myths are:

1. Does paper production cause an environmental burden on the forest?
2. Is there an environmental burden associated with unsolicited mail?
3. The environmental benefits related to the disposal of unsolicited mail.

## METHOD

The evidence of the myths were analyzed and compared with other analyzes regarding the unsolicited mail's impact on environment and climate. The electronic alternative is also analyzed based on current knowledge.

## RESULT

It is not sufficient to only account for the extent and development of forestland to conclude whether paper production has a burden on the forests, as this is a complex issue requiring the involvement of many elements. Sustainable forest management includes these elements. However, it has not been possible with the available data to conclude whether Swedish, Finnish or European forests are sustainable. GA changed their climate campaign and replaced "sustainable forestry", with "well-managed forestry", this weakens the myth since well-managed forestry only implies that the forest is subjected to a forest management plan. In Europe, 92% of forest area is subjected to forest management plans.

Production of unsolicited mail involves the use of paper, chemicals, energy and transport, therefore a certain amount of environmental impact is anticipated. Based on the two Life Cycle Assessments (LCA) (Pihkola et al., 2010) and (Larsen et al., 2006), it has been possible to assess the extent of the environmental impacts caused by the annual amount of mails a Danish household received in 2010 (55 kg). It is estimated to be in the range of 50-55 mPE and 70-75 kg CO<sub>2</sub>eq regarding the CO<sub>2</sub> emission.

In Denmark, unsolicited mail are used as a resource in both the recycled products and energy production, however, recovered papers in the form of used mail is considered as being of inferior quality due to the amount of ink. 60-70% of the mails are recycled and approximately 28-32% is incinerated. When reused, which can be done up to 7 times, it is possible to produce egg boxes, toilet paper, etc. According to Sanchez and Møller (2011) and Larsen et al. (2010) the benefits of recycling and incineration does not outweigh the environmental burden caused by unsolicited mail. Therefore the production of unsolicited mail is not environmentally beneficial, but involves an environmental impact and consumption of renewable and non-renewable resources.

Deselecting the unsolicited mail can lead some consumers to seek information elsewhere, such as the Internet. According to Sanchez and Møller (2011), though subjected to some uncertainty, if the unsolicited mails are replaced with electronic mails there is an environmental benefit.

The campaign "Reklamer Ja Tak" has, since the beginning of this project, worked hard towards a change in the current system and this project has provided them with solid arguments for why a change is necessary to reduce the amount of resources and the environmental impact from the unsolicited mail, furthermore the report has concluded that an internet based alternative is the favorite option.

Furthermore the government will now according to the government platform investigate the feasibility of establishing a "Ja tak til reklamer" system.