RECYCLING AND THE ARCHIVES

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The recycling movement has grown to the point where it has become official policy in many commercial, governmental and educational institutions and organizations. Tons of paper that were previously burned or buried are now assiduously collected by a multitude of offices and forwarded to the recycling center. From there they are baled and bundled into boxcars and transported to paper mills for reprocessing into new, recycled paper. This recycled paper is creating quite a demand among companies and institutions which feel they must maintain an environmental-activist image. The label "100% recycled" is fast becoming a status symbol.

Archivists have always been in the recycling business. In the past this has been the recycling of knowledge; the turning of administrative paper into historical paper. In addition, the constant recycling of file cabinets, as retention and disposition schedules empty and refill them, has long been a fringe on the banner of archival efficiency.

But the recycling of the paper itself p ses several problems for the archivist. The most subtle effect of recycling will be the slow replacement of rag bond paper by recycled paper. This will circumvent years of archival effort on paper permanence and its importance. It may be that documents on recycled paper will dispose of themselves long before the archivist has determined that their information content is negligible.

Perhaps more crucial to the archivist are the aggressive efforts of recycling programs to educate the office worker on the recyclability of almost everything. This may also undo years of work expended in the attempt to maintain strict controls over files and filing systems. Archivists will have lost another battle if, in the name of recycling, an offfce can discard paper with no concern for its record value and say: "But we didn't throw it away, we recycled it."

One solution would be for the archivist to work closely with environmentalists, desciibing the virtues of archives and records management and explaining that an archives already processes tons of paper, paper that could be recycled after the record value has diminished. Since one of the major problems of most recycling centers is the segregating and transporting of recyclable paper, they will be happy to discover that there is an agency, in effect, which is already set up to handle that. Cooperation in this regard may prove extremely beneficial.

An organization with a rapidly growing recycling program and a quiescent or nonexistent archives administration may find that, in their environmental zeal, most records and documents are recyclable rather than archival. The disappearance of these records would be more regrettable than their previous abandonment to closets, attics, and basements. Before recycling, people were hesitant to discard possibly useful papers, even if the possibility was slim, and more apt to store them - inefficiently but indefinitely. With recycling a possibility (or, as some have it, a moral imperative), there may be no hope for those old records.

Institutions which have archives but do not yet have a recycling project may find it best to organize those environmentalists who would be interested in such a program and develop the recycling project within the archives and records management function. After all, the concentration of the management of records in the archivist's office should also include management of the paper the record is on, shouldn't it?

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photographs and hear the band sing "Hail to the Orange." Though the past may be misused commemorate, ego build or justify a current private need, the Archives has a legitimate role in meeting human needs for an identification with the past.

A final goal of the Archives is to provide the documentation needed for the objective measurement of the University's performance compared with its stated aims. The Archives plays a vital role by identifying and organizing for long term retention the operational data which permits the qualitative and quantitative evaluation of university programs. Standards and judgments of quality are defined by documentation based on scholarly study.