

PAPER TOWELS

by Carrie Ann Solorzano

Take a couple seconds and look around any kitchen in the US and you're likely to spot a roll of paper towels at the ready. I admire the early beginnings of paper towels. They were invented in 1907 by the Scott Paper Company when a specific paper product didn't meet specifications. At first glance, this seems like brilliant recycling! However, that's where the brilliance ends.

Fast forward to today, Americans go through over 13 billion pounds of paper towels every year, which is 40 pounds, or 80 rolls... per person... per year. That's the equivalent of every man, woman, and child each going through an entire roll every 4.5 days. One estimate shows that paper towels often comprise 20-40% of waste by volume from places like office buildings and college dorms.

So what? To produce all these rolls, it takes 110 million trees and 130 billion gallons of water... per YEAR. It also takes a vast amount of energy to source, process, and transport the wood and wood products used to manufacture paper towels as well as transport the final product to stores, which is a pretty heavy carbon footprint.

And then, after all this detrimental environmental impact, a paper towel is used once and tossed away. That leads to 3,000 tons of single-use paper towels every year ending up in landfills, where they off-gas methane as they decompose, and methane greenhouse gas has been implicated in climate change.

As if the external environmental impact barely even touched upon above wasn't enough, what is the INTERNAL impact to humans, our pets, and every other living creature? Paper products like paper towels often contain dyes, inks, fragrances, chlorine bleach, formaldehyde, adhesives, and other toxic chemicals. Some common toxic chemicals in paper towels specifically are as follows: Chlorodibenzofurans, a group of over 135 types of chemicals, may affect the nervous system, respiratory system, and irritate the skin and eyes. Triclosan can be found in the bodies of most Americans and may affect the hormones and reproductive systems, and cause an increased sensitivity to allergens. Formaldehyde off-gasses into the air and can enter the body

through physically touching paper towels as well. Bisphenol S, created as a supposedly healthy alternative to Bisphenol A (BPA), has been found to have the same detrimental effects on people's health as BPA. It's commonly found in urine samples of Americans and may affect hormones and the reproductive system.

Solutions? Conscious awareness of not contributing to this significant environmental as well and health burden and intentionally using less. It'll be lighter on your wallet too! In public, use Thieves Hand Sanitizer or Thieves Spray instead of washing with (likely toxic-chemical-laden) soap and water. Your body will thank you for it too! If you must wash your hands, shake as much excess water off first and then if available, use an electric dryer or carry a small handkerchief with you. If not, use one paper towel instead of 3. Maybe even share with a friend if you can.

At home, use reusable towels. You may still want to keep a roll of paper towels on hand for biological hazards such as blood and pet messes. However, from the research I've done, I feel confident even with those types of messes using my Thieves Laundry Detergent to make sure our cleaning towels (along with everything else we put in the washing machine) come out super clean and safe! One statistic I found said that if every household in the United States swapped just 1 roll of regular paper towels with 100% recycled, we would save 54,000 trees. I believe we can do even better than that.