

The perfect paperless office system has remained an elusive goal since 1975, when a Business Week article entitled "The Office of the Future" predicted that by 1990 "most record-handling will be electronic." Old habits are hard to break. The convenience of desktop printing allows us to print anything and everything with the click of the mouse. Most offices are still drowning in paper, but the last two to three years have shown a decrease in paper sales in the United States. Analysts attribute this to advances in digital databases and communication systems and a generation of office workers who are more comfortable with the new technology. More information is being transmitted electronically, and more and more people are getting used to information residing only in electronic form and with not printing multiple backups.

There are many benefits that can be realized through reducing the amount of paper traveling through an office, in addition to reducing waste. Cost savings for paper and the staff time to handle and store paper documents can be substantial. Electronic files take up very little room compared to file cabinets. Files are safer and can be easier to find if properly stored electronically. The term "document management" (DM) covers a range of systems for managing paper and electronic files. To work towards a paperless office, a more specific term is "document imaging systems" - they include tools to help you convert paper records into electronic files.

In *The Myth of the Paperless Office* (2002), Abigail Sellen and Richard Harper use the study of paper as a way to understand the work that people do and why they do it the way they do. The physical properties of paper (thin, light, and



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flexible) allow the human actions of grasping, carrying, folding, and writing. The authors argue that paper will continue to play an important role in office life. Even if going "paperless" seems elusive, there are many ways to reduce the amount of paper in an office:

- ✓ Choose double-sided printing whenever possible
- ✓ Use the back side of waste paper for scratch paper.
- ✓ Do not print out e-mail or draft documents but review them on the computer.
- ✓ Reset to narrow margins in documents.
- ✓ Review the print set-up before printing.
- ✓ Share documents electronically.

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**Mary Campbell, Urban Sustainability Agent**  
Pinellas County Extension  
12520 Ulmerton Road, Largo, FL 33774  
727-582-2100

[www.pinellascountyextension.org](http://www.pinellascountyextension.org)