

Paper industry is alive and well

A few months ago Kimberly-Clark announced plans to close two production facilities in the Fox Valley. This decision was unexpected and shocked many people from Neenah to Madison. Announcements that a mill is going to close, especially from a name as storied as Kimberly-Clark, cause a variety of reactions. They range from “the paper industry in Wisconsin is dead” to “what can be done.”

Let me address both.

Let me emphatically state that the paper industry in Wisconsin is alive and well. While the industry does face challenges and has changed over the past few decades, there are still more than 30,000 people employed in the pulp and paper industry in Wisconsin. When you add in the entire forest products industry the number employed totals to more than 50,000 people.

Wisconsin is the No. 1 papermaking state in the U.S., a distinction we have held for years, and I am confident we will continue to keep that ranking for years to come. The reason for this is the types of paper we produce in Wisconsin.

The knee jerk reaction when you think about paper is printing and writing paper. As technology has eroded that market, but that type of paper is a small segment of what we make here. And the printing and writing paper made in Wisconsin is typically higher end stock and is in demand.

What you need to know is that nearly 85 percent of the paper made in Wisconsin is three types of grades that are in markets experiencing varying degrees of growth — tissue, packaging, and specialty papers.

Start with tissue. Wisconsin has several tissue and consumer products mills. These products cannot be replaced by technology. Challenge anyone reading this to blow their nose or wipe your hands using your iPhone or tablet. Suffice to say, it won't work out very well.

Take a look at your facial tissue and toilet paper tissue at home. And that napkin you used with dinner last night. When you sit out this weekend, pay attention to the tis-



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tissue dispensers when you are in a restaurant or bar and see how many say either SCA (now Essity), Tork, Georgia-Pacific, or eMotion.

Yes, made in Wisconsin.

Paper mills that make brown paper for packaging have a significant presence in Wisconsin. It is no secret that traditional retail stores are struggling, but the flip side is that e-commerce is booming. Someone has to make all those boxes that are being delivered all over the world. It is likely that some part of that package was made here in Wisconsin. And if you are going to the store to shop and you run across a marketing display in the grocery or department store, the odds are good that it was produced by the packaging papermakers in Wisconsin.

Finally, specialty papers are produced throughout Wisconsin. Did you know that every brown wrapper that holds a Reese's Peanut Butter Cup and every white ribbon atop a Hershey's Kiss is made in

Wisconsin? That virtually every microwave popcorn bag is made in Wisconsin? How about the Starbucks coffee cup you use every day? Yes, likely made in Wisconsin.

We make numerous paper products for the food industry. Next time you are unwrapping your sandwich from a fast food place or baking at home with parchment there is a good chance you are holding a paper product made in Wisconsin.

Lottery tickets. Receipts printed at a gas pump. Bag tags for luggage. Beer and wine labels. Masking tape. Coffee filters. Medical gowns. Protective paper for stainless steel appliances and the Boeing Dreamliner jet. The list goes on, and they are all made in Wisconsin.

I've painted a pretty picture, but the industry still faces challenges and threats that require the attention of decision makers in Madison and Washington. Our energy costs are some of the highest in the nation. Air and water regulations are necessary but they have become increasingly costly while providing little to no additional benefit to the environment. Like most employers, our workforce is aging and we need the papermakers of tomorrow to be trained for the jobs that are available.

Trade policy must continue to provide open markets for our products while addressing instances of illegal dumping of cheap products in the U.S.

Transportation policy needs to allow shipping of our raw materials and finished products to be cost effective and safe. Tax policy needs to be fair and competitive whether it is on the state or federal level.

In other words, we need some common sense decisions to be made that allow the paper industry to continue to be one of the economic bedrocks in Wisconsin. The Paper Council looks forward to providing solutions to policy makers on these and other issues so we don't have more announcements like the one we had from Kimberly-Clark.

Jeff Landin is president of the Wisconsin Paper Council