

Making paper out of banana and sugar cane waste

By Janine Israel of AAP

Sydney, May 26 AAP - While some greenies are chaining themselves to trees, the humble banana may hold the key to saving the planet.

An Australian company has developed a process which turns banana waste into paper.

Not only does it save forests, reduce landfill, air and ocean pollution and greenhouse emissions, but it also saves money.

Scientific evidence that the otherwise wasted stalks from banana plantations can provide the planet with enough paper for generations, could see the end of the tree slaughtering cycle, scientist Ramy Azer said.

Mr Azer founded Papyrus Australia four years ago with the aim of finding environmentally friendly alternatives to paper and fibre markets.

He says every tonne of banana waste saves around 20 mature trees from being woodchipped for paper.

"Logging companies are running out of forests to chop down, so sooner or later, we have to look at another source of fibre," Mr Azer told AAP.

"The established forestry and related industries have so much invested in current production techniques that ... they are not interested in the relative advantage of other products."

Papyrus Australia said banana paper production has a minimal environmental impact. It is free of chemicals, uses less energy than pulp paper and does not require large amounts of fresh water.

Mr Azer said establishing a banana paper manufacturing mill costs hundreds of thousands of dollars as opposed to billions of dollars for conventional mills.

Papyrus Australia's development was established from Mr Azer's passion for the environment and a half a million dollar grant from the federal government.

"Although we need the people who chain themselves to the trees, we

also need people to save the environment from the other side by producing viable technology-wise new methods," he said

The paper has generated remarkable international interest and the United Nations and European Union plan to supply the technology to impoverished African countries.

"It's not just a dream," Mr Azer said of the paper -- due to hit the market at the end of next year.

"We've got the seal of approval from government, industry and research institutions "

The first manufacturing plant in the world will soon open in the heart of Australia's banana growing country, in Tully, Queensland.

The waste from sugar cane, palm plantations and rubber trees can also use the same technology to make paper.

Mr Azer said while hemp is actually a better fibre for paper-making, it is still illegal as a commercial crop and requires land clearing, chemicals, water and energy for production, while banana plantations are already established

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