



Use forest-friendly paper, Atwood tells publishers at Frankfurt book fair

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VANCOUVER (CP) - At the Frankfurt fairgrounds where Gutenberg sold his Bible in the 1500s, Margaret Atwood is trying to get people to wake up to the modern age.

She is part of a Canadian-led effort to persuade the industry to use so-called Ancient Forest Friendly paper which is 100 per cent post-consumer recycled, chlorine-free paper and fibre.

"It's nice to be a world leader in something," Atwood said with a wry tone.

The Booker Prize nominee was doing a telephone interview while taking a break in her hotel room from the chaotic and internationally known fair that attracts thousands of exhibitors.

Two years ago Canadian publishers McLelland and Stewart and Raincoast Books signed on to a campaign by a Tofino, B.C., environmentalist and began sourcing the costly paper.

Now some 35 Canadian companies are on board and their numbers have helped persuade forest companies to produce forest-friendly paper and printers to stock it.

The campaign was also given a boost when Raincoast Books printed the fifth in the Harry Potter series on recycled paper for readers in Canada.

"Until recently, there weren't a lot of alternatives, but now there are and we need to put people on to them while there is still something out there to save," Atwood said.

"We have shown that we can create a market for this Ancient Forest Friendly paper, and forest companies are nervous right now so it makes sense for them to diversify."

Atwood said the paper isn't proving a tough sell in eco-minded Europe.

"When I turned up to my first interview with a German television station, that was what they wanted to talk about. All the journalists here are asking."

Atwood plans to take her lobbying efforts to dinner when all of her international publishers are seated for a feast being held in her honour.

"The Germans are very keen environmentalists," Atwood said. "They are already growing fast-growing trees that they harvest like wheat and they recycle quite a bit, but they know they could be doing more."

The campaign by Tofino's Markets Initiatives is focused on protecting Canada's boreal forest. It was launched this week in London and Frankfurt in workshops held for publishers.

Markets Initiatives estimates that Canadian publishers have saved 70,000 trees in the past two years of using Ancient Forest Friendly paper.

"With boreal forests, when we cut down trees, erosion sets in and not much of anything grows," said Atwood, who first began championing the cause of recycled paper with a stunt that saw her and other authors posing for cameras in bed.

The recycled paper campaign is an easy one for authors because in most cases, it's the publisher that absorbs the higher cost of the eco-friendly paper.

When Atwood's Canadian publisher, McLelland and Stewart, first started buying it, the paper cost about 15 per cent more than the non-recycled variety.

A spokesman for Raincoast Books said using the recycled paper cost the company an extra three cents a book on the Harry Potter run. That translated into a \$200,000 hit.

But the run prompted a lot of changes within the Canadian market.

Mills in Vancouver and Quebec are now making the paper, meaning it no longer has to be purchased from U.S. suppliers.

And eight printers are now stocking forest-friendly paper, of which several varieties of improved quality have been developed.

The good publicity the paper brings has pushed more and more publishers to use it, which has led to lower prices, said McLelland and Stewart's Vicki Black who was also campaigning with Atwood in Frankfurt.

"We have been able to negotiate and win price parity with a number of printers," she said.

"So we can print about 65 per cent of our titles on Ancient Forest Friendly paper this year, compared to three titles out of 40 in our first year."

She has spoken this week to colleagues from Italy to Australia and said a number are ready to start buying the paper.

Atwood said she expects change is coming, especially after the buzz J.K. Rowling created with a special message she wrote in Canadian editions of her book encouraging children to protect the forests.

"That was a good thing that she did," said Atwood.

Atwood and Rowling share the same British publisher, Bloomsbury, which recently entered into a partnership with Atwood's German publisher. Atwood said she and Rowling are hoping to get everyone on the same forest-friendly page soon.

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