

Black-and-white printing goes green with soy toner

April 22 2009, By DINESH RAMDE , AP Business Writer

(AP) -- Every time you print out a page on a laser printer you're using toner made from petroleum-based products. Now there's a greener choice that shows promise: a toner product derived from soybean oil.

While some customers might be wary, potential benefits are clear. It's easier to recycle paper printed with soy. And perhaps more important in a sour economy, soy toners can cost less than the standard alternative. Soybeans are a renewable resource whose price is likely to be more stable than that of oil.

Newspaper, magazine and book publishers have shifted to soy-based ink in recent years.

Early results suggest soy toners work as advertised. In a recent test involving identical documents from two identical printers - one with a new Hewlett-Packard cartridge and the other a soy cartridge - the printouts were indistinguishable, equally dark and smudge-proof.

The soy cartridge was supplied by PRC Technologies, a division of Print Recovery Concepts Inc. in Standish, Maine. Rick Greenlaw, the company's vice president of marketing, said its goal was to make sure soy toners were cheaper than traditional ones.

"Our interest is in the person willing to go green as long as doesn't it cost them more. Period," he said.

One of SoyPrint's biggest distributors is LaserMonksGreen, a Web site operated by Cistercian monks of Our Lady of Spring Bank in Sparta, Wis. The group says it makes enough money to run the abbey and donates the rest to charity. For every cartridge of soy toner it sells, LaserMonksGreen has a tree planted in Brazil and donates \$1 to a world hunger organization. The monks also pray for customers.

LaserMonksGreen sells soy toner in cartridges that fit into an HP [printer](#) just like the originals. The soy versions can cost about 20 percent less than new HP cartridges, although remanufactured cartridges that have been refilled with traditional toner can be even less expensive than SoyPrint.

For example, OfficeDepot.com sells a Q5942X cartridge for HP printers for \$249. A SoyPrint alternative is \$181. A remanufactured version with regular toner is \$120.

(The soy toner is a dry powder that works in laser printers. There's no equivalent product for ink-jet printers.)

So far, larger companies that produce petroleum-based toners - and derive much of their profit from toner and ink - say they're monitoring renewable materials but have no immediate plans for something comparable.

Hewlett-Packard said in a statement that its research suggested bio-based materials "have not met HP's high-performance standards and may not be appropriate for many printing applications."

Another printer maker, Lexmark International Inc., said it's in the early stages of vestigating corn- and soy-based resins but wouldn't comment further.

That leaves PRC Technologies as one of the main suppliers for now. Its products are only for HP black-and-white laser-jet printers, but it plans to introduce products for other major printer brands this summer. Color cartridges are in the works.

Cathy Martin, a senior consultant with InfoTrends in Weymouth, Mass., questions whether some buyers will hesitate to trust a vegetable-based product in their expensive computer hardware.

But for Wayne Boyd, 68, who is retired in San Antonio, the lower price of a SoyPrint cartridge was enough to get him interested. He says environmental concerns played only a small role in his decision to try SoyPrint.

"Right now money's more important than the environment," Boyd said. "You can't eat clean air."

On the Net:

LaserMonksGreen: <http://www.lasermonksgreen.com>

SoyPrint: <http://soyprint.net>

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