THE PAPER INDUSTRY HAS BEEN A SUSTAINABLE ONE FOR MORE THAN 150 YEARS, CREATING CLEAN, ADVANCED MANUFACTURING JOBS. THE INDUSTRY AND ITS WORKERS HAVE SOUGHT TO ELIMINATE WASTE, RECYCLE, AND IMPROVE ENERGY EFFICIENCY FOR DECADES TO MAKE PRODUCTS USED BY AMERICANS EVERY DAY.
USW Paper Jobs
The United Steelworkers is the primary union for workers in the pulp and paper sector, representing more than 90,000 working people. They produce the cardboard, graphic papers, specialty papers, and specialty pulp used to make everyday goods including dry goods boxes; boxes for beer and soda; tubes for toilet paper; paper for notebooks, legal pads, and magazines; filter paper for coffee filters; and fluff pulp for diapers. The industry is highly concentrated in the U.S. South, upper Midwest, and Northeast. These advanced-manufacturing workers earn family-sustaining wages and benefits, and have the protection of a union contract.

Recycling
Paper is one of the most sustainable and renewable products on the market; as many people say, everything but the shade is used in making paper. It can be recycled four to six times on average and is the most recovered product at three times the amount by weight compared to aluminum, steel, glass, and plastic combined, according to the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA). The 2018 paper recycling percentage rate was 68.1 percent, and the goal for 2020 is to reach 70 percent. Most recycled content comes from commercial recycling programs. Policy efforts must increase residential recycling rates and decrease contamination in the recycling stream.

Energy Efficiency
Pulp and paper mills self-generate most of the electricity they need to run their facilities. Of this self-generated electricity, combined heat and power (CHP) accounts for 98.5 percent of electricity generated in the U.S. paper industry. CHP is an energy efficient technology that generates electricity and captures the heat that would otherwise be wasted to provide useful thermal energy. Tax credits and other incentives have helped with the widespread adoption of this technology in the industry.

Energy from Biomass
The pulp and paper sector uses biomass waste, also called “black liquor,” to generate roughly 66 percent of the energy needed for production. When black liquor is burned, it re-releases existing carbon into the atmosphere, which can be used again by living trees as forests are cyclically harvested and replanted. This carbon cycle occurs naturally through decay of dead trees, and the use of black liquor for energy should be recognized as an important greenhouse gas emissions reduction strategy. Many U.S. states and countries around the world recognize black liquor as a carbon neutral energy source.

Water Conservation
The pulp and papermaking process uses a lot of water. One of the big advances of the last decade is the industry’s research and implementation of technologies to reuse water at least ten times. After this repeated use, 88 percent of the water returns to the environment after being treated in a wastewater system. The remaining 12 percent of water evaporates or is in the finished products.

Forest Management
Sustainable forest management conserves biological diversity, clean water resources, soil, clean air, and habitats for many species. More than half of the forests in the United States are privately owned and managed to supply the industry. Trees are replanted with a replacement rate of approximately two to one. The demand for paper products ensures that forests supply wood, but also that they sequester carbon, prevent accumulated fuel for forest fires, and maintain the biodiversity of the ecosystem. Most pulp and paper companies source from forests that abide by standards developed by the Sustainable Forestry Initiative (SFI), American Tree Farm System (ATFS), the Forest Stewardship Council (FSC®), and others. The industry also acts as a safeguard against illegal logging by requiring documentation of fiber sources, signed agreements, and third-party certification.

Advanced Manufacturing
The paper industry is constantly working to better their processes and products through the use of innovative technology in order to further increase sustainability in the industry. Water and energy efficiency technologies have been widely adopted across the sector in the United States. The industry is also researching alternative fiber sources like agricultural waste and methods to increase recyclability.