



Paper Mill Effluent is an Alternate for Irrigation and Nutrient Sources in Improving Soil Health and Agricultural Productivity

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Authors' contributions

This work was carried out in collaboration among all authors. All authors read and approved the final manuscript.

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ABSTRACT

Consumption of huge fresh water and the generation of a huge volume of toxic wastewater are two most important environmental concerns associated with paper industries. Hence, it is necessary to study the impact of these effluents on soil and crop before they recommended for agricultural purpose. Paper mill effluent is rich in dissolved solids as well as varying amounts of suspended organic materials. Besides, it contain some trace metals like Hg, Pb, and Cr. Discharge from effluents through paper mill, which contain bleach and black liquor, directly reached water bodies, thus causing serious environmental related issues. It contains recalcitrant dissolved organic matter and further it induces a high biochemical oxygen demand. On the other hand, treated paper mill

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effluent is considered a resource in agriculture and that can be applied for productive uses since it contains nutrients that have the potential for use in agriculture and other activities. So, use of this wastewater efficiently for agricultural crops can be an alternated source for fertilizer as well as irrigation water.

Keywords: Paper mill effluent; toxic elements; treatment; nutrient source; crop yield.

1. INTRODUCTION

“Water is the most valuable resources in the world. Nowadays, in many places water resources are gradually becoming polluted by the addition of huge amounts of sewage, industrial waste, and effluents. These waste and effluents contain materials with varying properties, from simple nutrients to highly toxic substances. The discharge of industrial effluents with varying amounts of pollutants has altered the land and water quality. Among the different major industries, the paper industry is one of the polluter of the environment. There are nearly 700 paper mills in India, with an installed capacity of paper production about 701.4 lakh metric tonnes. During paper production, the mills release a large amount of wastewater containing various physical and chemical agents. They are discharged into land or nearby water bodies. The polluted water is being used for irrigation by nearby farmers. Nowadays, treated effluent is considered a alternates to water and nutrient resource, which may prove beneficial for plant growth. These effluents fall in borderline as saline water, but they can be considered as potential source for irrigation” [1]. “The treated paper mill effluent had higher biological oxygen demand (BOD) and chemical oxygen demand (COD) values with low NPK, while the contents of sodium, calcium, sulphate, and chloride were higher” [2]. “Paper mill effluent irrigation has the greatest potential in increasing crop yields with significant savings in water and nutrients. In the present paper, an attempt has been made to explore the beneficial and adverse effects of using paper mill effluent in soil and crops. Paper making techniques was originated from China and first handmade paper mill India was started during 14th century. Further. More than 10 paper mills were commissioned in this period, and by 1931, the production capacity had reached 45,600 metric tonnes” [3].

2. CLASSIFICATION OF PAPER MILLS

“Paper mills are classified based on the raw material used, plant size, and end products manufactured as follows. A. Wood or forest-based mills: In this type indigenous hardwood

pulp from bamboo, eucalyptus and imported pulp etc. are used. Agro-residue-based mills: In this class agricultural residues such as rice straw, wheat, sarkanda grass, bagasse, jute, etc. used as raw materials. Wastepaper-based mills: These mills use imported and indigenous wastepaper, corrugated waste paper, kraft paper, and waste cuttings as raw materials” [4].

3. CHEMICAL CONSTITUENTS OF RAW MATERIALS AND WASTEWATER

“Chemical constituents of paper and pulp industry effluent are given in Table 1. These large quantities of effluents need to be characterized for evolving proper treatment strategy prior to their disposal” [5]. “The manufacturing process in pulp and paper making uses a large amount of fresh water and most notorious sources of industrial pollution. The Ministry of Environment and Forests, Government of India, has categorized the pulp and paper industry as one of the twenty most polluting industries” [6]. “The exact chemical composition of pulp and paper mill effluent is complex and unclear. The pulp and paper mill effluent are contains mostly degrading products of lignin, cellulose, hemicellulose, and wood extractives” [7].

4. DIFFERENT PROCESS IN PAPER PRODUCTION

The typical pulp and paper manufacturing processes involved and different wastewaters generated are shown in Fig. 1.

4.1 Wastewater Treatment

The wastewater treatments are involved both physicochemical and biological methods. Effluent discharge standards for pulp and paper mills under environmental (Protection) Act 1986 is given in Table 2.

4.1.1 Physicochemical treatment

- “Several physicochemical colour removal methods, such as adsorption, rapid sand filtration, chemical precipitation, membrane

Table 1. The organic composition and COD characteristics of pulp and papermill effluents [8]

S.No.	Wastewater	COD (mg/L)	Organic composition % COD	Potential inhibitory compounds
1.	Wet debarking	1300-1400	Tannins 30-35, monomeric phenols 10-20, simple carbohydrates 30-40, resin compounds 5,	Tannins, resin acids
2.	Sulphite spent liquor	120000-220000	lignosulphates 50-60, carbohydrates 15-25	-
3.	Sulphur evaporator condensate SEC	7500-50000	Acetic acid 33-60, methanol 10 -25, fatty acids < 10	Sulphur, organic sulphur
4.	Chlorine bleaching	900-2000	Chlorine lignin polymers 65 -75, Methanol 1 -27	Chlorinated phenols, resin acids
5.	Kraft evaporator condensate KEC	1000-33600	Methanol 60-90	Sulphur, resin acids, fatty acids, volatile terpenes
6.	TMP effluent	1000-5600	Carbohydrates 25-40	Resin acids
7.	CTMP effluent	2300-13000	Polysaccharides 10-15, carbohydrates 25-45, Organic acids 35-40	Sulphur, fatty acids

processes, and electrochemical methods, have been developed and reported in the literature in the past" [8].

- Adsorption methods are increasingly being considered for the removal of synthetic organic chemicals, colour-forming organics, and disinfection byproducts.
- "The membrane techniques require pre-treatment and a large capital investment and efficient technologies" [9]. "The application of the electrochemical method is another way to treat the wastewater from cellulose paper production" [10].
- "Chemical precipitation using alum, ferric chloride, and lime has been extensively studied" [11]. "Despite the short detention time and low capital cost, there are some drawbacks reported, such as the high cost of chemicals for precipitation and pH adjustment, voluminous sludge production due to heavy dosages, dewatering and disposing of generated sludge, and high residual cation levels. The chemical precipitation methods are cheap but produce a large quantity of sludge and do not completely remove toxicity" [59].

- Calcium hypochlorite (1–2% of available chlorine) during alkaline extraction reduced the colour of effluent by 84% and chlorinated backwater (having 0.8% residual chlorine) used during brown stock washing without affecting the quality of pulp. Alum, lime, and magnesium sulphate used to reduce colour, biological oxygen demand and chemical oxygen demand by 97%, 68%, and 52%, respectively.

4.1.2 Biological methods

- Biological methods have the potential to eliminate or reduce the problems associated with physicochemical methods. Numerous bacteria have been reported to decompose lignins and lignin derivatives, some of which include *Pseudomonas* spp., *Flavobacteria*, *Xanthomonas* spp., *Bacillus* spp., *Aeromonas* spp., *Cellulomonas* spp., *Chromobacteria*, etc.
- "A variety of fungi have been proven to be lignin degraders and are classified into white-rot, soft-rot, and brown-rot fungi based on the type of wood decay carried out by these organisms" [12].

- “The white rot fungi are a group of basidiomycetes that possess an active lignolytic enzyme system, which is the most efficient of the microorganisms that degrade lignin and its modified forms” [13]. “In addition to degrading lignin, these fungi are also capable of degrading a variety of environmentally persistent pollutants, such as chlorinated aromatic compounds, heterocyclic aromatic hydrocarbons, synthetic high polymers, and various dyes” [14].
- “Several authors reported on the capacity of different fungal species to remove color from kraft mill effluent” [15,16,17]. [18] reported “on a substantial reduction of colour chemical oxygen demand by the use of the white-rot fungi, *T. versicolor* and *P. chrysosporium*” [19]. indicated that “the white-rot fungi *P. chrysosporium*, in combination with other white-rot fungi (*P. sanguineus*, *P. ostreatus*, and *H. annosum*), and with the use of surfactants, were able to remove color and lignin content” [20]. isolated “a fungal species (*Penicillium sp.*) that was able to remove 50% of the AOX and colour from the soft-wood bleachery effluents in a contact time of 2 days” [21]. stated that “*s. T. versicolor* and fungal culture filtrate (FCF) efficiently degrade the dissolved and colloidal substances”. “The other white-rot fungi such as *Tinctoporia borbonica*, *Schizophyllum commune*, *Aspergillus fumigatus*, and *Pleurotus ostreatus*, among others” [22].

Table 2. Effluent discharge standards for pulp and paper mills under environmental (Protection) Act 1986

S.No.	Category	Standard	Note
1.	Large (writing & printing) pulp and paper mills	200 m ³ /tonne of paper 150 m ³ /T	Standards of discharge for the large pulp & paper mills established from 1992 onward to meet standard of 100 m ³ /tonne of paper
2.	Agro-residue based	200 m ³ / tonne of paper	Agro-residue based mills established from January 1992 onward to meet the standards of 150 m ³ /tonne of paper
3.	Wastepaper based mill	75 m ³ /tonne of paper	Wastewater based mills established from January 1992 onward to meet the standards of 50 m ³ /tonne of paper

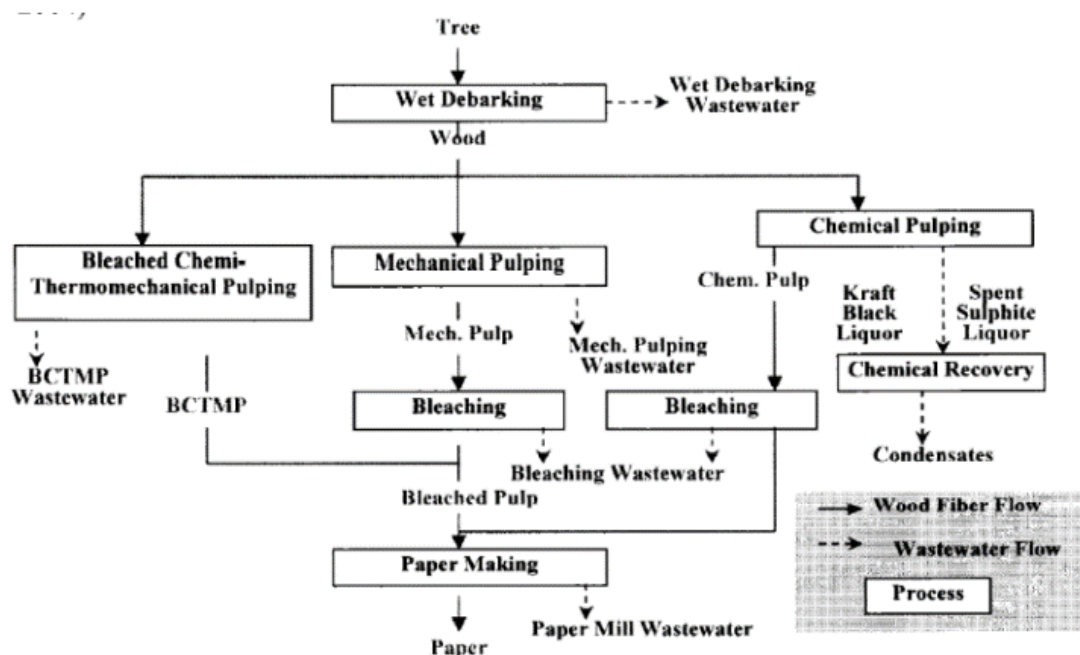


Fig. 1. Different processes involved in pulp and paper production and corresponding wastewater generated [4]

5. EFFECT OF UNTREATED EFFLUENT ON AGRICULTURE

the germination of rice seeds and reduce shoot weight [28, 29 &30]

5.1 Effect of Untreated Effluent on Land Quality

“Elements such as magnesium, sodium chloride, and sulphur, which are also common in pulp mill wastewater, can cause nutrient imbalances in crops, increase soil salinity, deteriorate soil structure, and ultimately lower crop productivity in the long run” [23]. Higher values of EC, organic carbon, available K, exchangeable cations (Ca^{2+} , Mg^{2+}), exchangeable anion (Cl^- , HCO_3^-), and micronutrient cation (Cu^{2+}) have been reported in soils being irrigated by paper and pulp industry effluents.

5.5 Effect of Treated Effluent on Soil Properties

The soil has both inherent and dynamic properties. In India, a tropical country, drought conditions and the depletion of groundwater sources necessitate an alternate irrigation source and the positive impact of treated paper mill effluent is given Table 6. The various irrigation sources can be augmented by using the effluent from the pulp and paper industry.

5.2 Effect of Untreated Effluent on CROPS

Pulp and paper mill effluent is also responsible for affecting the quality of crops due to irrigation with polluted water, which damages the soil, growth, quality, and yield of the crop (Table 3).

The reuse of industrial effluents for irrigation purposes is an alternate and effective waste disposal method commonly called "agro-recycling" where wastewater and plant nutrients could be recycled to diminish pollution and accomplish additional income (Table 6). The use of industrial effluents for agricultural purposes involves two main principles: the use of soil as a treatment system to reduce pollution of surface water and the use of wastewater as a supplementary source of irrigation. In certain cases, thus, the lack of nutrients can also perhaps be compensated to a limited extent by industrial effluent irrigation.

5.3 Effects of Untreated Effluent on Water Bodies

“The dark colour and high turbidity due to suspended solids can cause problems with both water opacity and blanketing of river or lakebeds and can reduce photosynthetic activity in aquatic plants” [27,28]. Severe blanketing may result in anaerobic decomposition under the blanket, releasing hydrogen sulphide into aquatic ecosystems. Therefore, it becomes necessary to remove colour and toxicity before they can be accepted into surface waters.

The adverse effects of effluent irrigation from paper factories could be alleviated by resorting to the application of N, P, and K along with organic and inorganic amendments such as press mud, farmyard manure, and gypsum [48]. Subsequent research on paper mill waste utilisation in agriculture [49] has revealed numerous benefits with no deterioration in crop produce and increased the productivity of various crops (Fig. 2). Part of agricultural land is currently under irrigation, hence to improve agriculture efficient water application technology needs to be critically considered as water scarcity is a major constraint in the agriculture [58].

5.4 Effect of Untreated Effluent on Soil Biology

Deleterious effect on water bodies is given in Table 5. The paper mill effluents adversely affect

Table 3. Negative impact of untreated effluent on crops

S. No.	Negative impact
1.	Decrease germination percentage and seedling growth in crops [23]
2.	Inhibiting effect on the germination of crops [24]
3.	Reduces crop growth and gives severe adverse effect on soil properties [25]
4.	Seed germination in Sunflower and maize [26]
5.	Germination of seeds in paddy [28]
6.	Reduction in shoot weight (44%) in paddy [29]
7.	Germination percentage and yield in paddy [30]

Table 4. Effect of untreated effluent on water bodies

S.No.	Impact on water bodies
1.	Accumulate metal (loid)s, salts, and organic compounds might be toxic to soil fauna and flora [30]
2.	Antibiotics are bioactive compounds affecting soil biological activity [31]
3.	Wastewater-borne microorganisms might compete with indigenous microbial communities [32]
4.	Microbiological population from aerobic to anaerobic microorganisms due to short-term oxygen depletion of the topsoil decrease in oxygen diffusion rate [33]
5.	Stimulation of copiotrophic bacteria was observed in the same long-term wastewater irrigation area [34,35]

Table 5. Effect of treated effluent application on improvement in soil physical and chemical properties

S.No.	Effect of treated effluent application on improvement in soil physical and chemical properties
1.	Soil physical and hydraulic properties [36]
2.	Soil aggregate stability [37]
3.	Bulk density and porosity induced [38, 39]
4.	Actinomycetes and fungi population [40]
5.	Soil nutrients status [41]
6.	N, PO ₄ , Na, K, Mg, and Ca ([42]
7.	Na, and extractable S, Zn, Fe, Mn, Pb, and Ni [43]
8.	Soil pH and organic C, N, P, and K. [44]
9.	Organic carbon (3.2–5.9 gkg ⁻¹), and concentrations of N, P, K, and Na [45]
10.	Long-term wastewater irrigation affects total microbial biomass and/or soil enzyme activities in different soils [46]
11.	Increase in bacterial counts and bacterial activity [47]
12.	Increased the soil bacteria, actinomycetes, fungi, rhizobia, and yeasts, and the populations of soil microorganisms [44])

Table 6. Effect of treated effluent on crop growth

S.No.	Effect of paper mill effluent irrigation on positive impact of crop growth
1.	Germination percentage, plant height, crop growth rate (CGR), and relative growth rate (RGR), of sorghum, maize, and sunflower [47]
2.	Pod yield and oil content of the groundnut [48]
3.	Yield parameters of tomato, viz., number of fruiting clusters, fruit weight, and fruit yield were higher [49]
4.	Quality traits of bhendi and amaranthus improved [50]
5.	Cowpea yield by up to 28 percent and the nodule formation [51]
6.	Higher chlorophyll, protein content, root length, shoot length, leaf area, and total biomass in black grammes at a 10% concentration of paper mill effluent irrigation. [42]
7.	Bacterial, fungal, and nodule counts had also increased in blackgram up to 50% concentration [52]
8.	Germination and growth of peas[53]
9.	Pod (2608 kg ha ⁻¹) and kernel yield (1534 kg/ ha) [54]
10.	Length of seedlings after germination in vegetable crops [55]
11.	Yield and biominerals viz., Ca and Fe, of banana [56]
12.	Paper mill effluent on germination, seedling growth and chlorophyll content in Zea mays L [57]
13.	Increase in chlorophyll content, plant height, shoot and root biomass, grain yield etc. in <i>Triticum aestivum</i> L. [28]

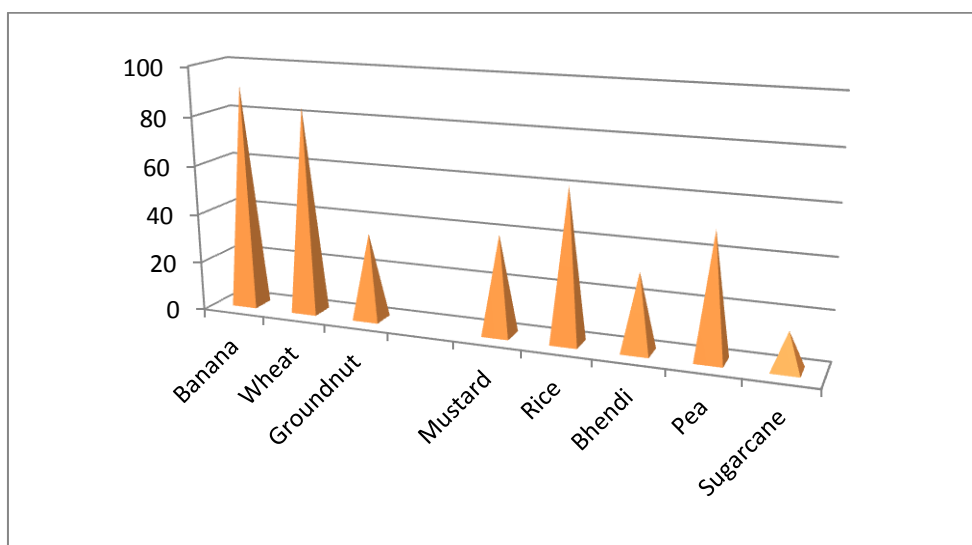


Fig. 2. Effect of paper mill effluent on yield in various crops (%)

6. CONCLUSION

Several studies have been done on the impact of various industrial effluents on various crops. Paper mill effluent is reported to be rich in mineral nutrition which could improve growth and yield. Maintaining good soil quality and minimizing soil pollution and degradation are of fundamental importance to preserving agriculture and developing the economy of the country. For enhancing food production, proper and effective use of available land, water and fertilizer resources are essential. Nowadays, treated wastewater is considered a potential water and nutrient resource because it contains a considerable amount of nutrients, which may prove beneficial for plant growth. Raw paper mill effluent has an adverse effect on the growth and development of crops and soil, but treated paper mill effluent in lower concentrations is not toxic on crop and also in soil. The beneficial effects of effluent on crops are proved by many studies. Hence, it can be recommended for appropriate dilution of the effluent of a paper mill for agricultural crops and it could be used for irrigation in agricultural fields to enhance crop productivity. Thus, from the foregoing review, it could be concluded that the treated paperboard mill effluent and solid wastes could be used for crop production without any adverse effect on yield and quality of produce.

COMPETING INTERESTS

Authors have declared that no competing interests exist.

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