

Environmentally Preferable Purchasing5

Environmentally preferable purchasing (EPP) is the first step in waste reduction. It is so important that it warrants a chapter all of its own. Purchasing decisions carry through your workplace to affect storage, use, and final disposal of materials. Almost everything that is discarded in your workplace was purchased at one time. Making wise purchasing decisions will help you to reduce waste in all operations. See Chapter 11 for a list of web sites and resources about EPP.

“If you don’t see recycled-content products, ask your suppliers for them.”

- *Reduce multiple points of purchasing.* Take advantage of potential economies of scale by working with a limited number of suppliers. Packaging waste will be reduced if products are purchased in bulk from fewer sources where possible.
- *Meet with suppliers to discuss waste prevention goals and solicit ideas.* Suppliers often offer suggestions for preventing waste and for increasing a business’ opportunity to purchase items made with recovered content. Request updates from your suppliers as new products made with recycled materials are introduced to the market. Suppliers may have ideas based on successes of other similar businesses.
- *Purchase commonly used products in bulk packaging.* For example, in food service, coffee can be scooped into filters using a measuring cup instead of purchasing proportioned packets. Also, rice, pasta, and beans can be purchased in large sacks instead of small boxes and measured for recipes. Dry goods purchased in bulk can be stored in large, resealable containers. Do not purchase items in bulk that will spoil before all of the product is used.
- *Purchase refurbished toner cartridges for printers.* Office administrators can purchase refurbished toner cartridges, which are of comparable quality to new cartridges and make the same number of copies, but are 30 to 50 percent less expensive. Most major brands of printer cartridges (e.g., Hewlett Packard, IBM etc.) offer refurbished alternatives. See Appendix C for a list of companies that refurbish toner cartridges.

GREEN STARS

U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, National Biological Service

- As mandated by the Department of the Interior, purchases recycled white and colored paper.
- Purchases recycled toner cartridges.
- Visits the Defense Reutilization and Marketing Office at Elmendorf Air Force Base to access items, including furniture, field gear, and camping gear.

- *Purchase supplies and materials with recycled content.* Numerous products are available with both pre- and post-consumer recycled content. Visit USEPA's Comprehensive Procurement Guidelines web site at www.epa.gov/cpg for information about available recycled-content products. The U.S. EPA has specified for Federal purchases a percentage of 30% post-consumer recycled content. This standard and others set out by the Procurement Guidelines are valuable for the business community in that they identify what is available on the market and what is achievable.

Common office products available with recycled content include office paper, file folders, and hanging folders. Computer diskettes that have been reformatted also are for sale under the brand name of Green Disks. These disks are salvaged from overstocks of computer software, reformatted, repackaged, and sold for much less than the cost of a virgin disk. See Chapter 11 for a list of local retailers and wholesalers who offer recycled and refurbished office products.

- *Purchase supplies in recyclable packaging.* Determine what is accepted in local recycling programs and discuss packaging alternatives with suppliers. For example, if a product can be shipped in regular corrugated cardboard boxes instead of waxed boxes, the cardboard can be recycled.
- *Rewrite specifications and Invitations to Bid to include EPP.* Incorporating environmentally preferable purchasing into your bidding process will ensure that your products and services are more environmentally sound. The first step is to determine if your specifications include any language that precludes environmentally preferable products. For example, remove language that requires only new or virgin products or specifies light colors or high brightness factors that recycled-content products may not be able to meet. Then review and revise your standard terms and conditions to reflect your EPP policies. For example, look for and modify "all new" clauses to allow recycled or remanufactured products. Also, check warranty clauses to ensure that warranties are not voided if using a refurbished or remanufactured product.
- *Consider a product's entire life span when looking at costs.* When purchasing items, look beyond just the purchase cost to include initial costs, which include installation, electricity and water hookups; employee training costs; operating and maintenance costs; and disposal costs for the product, its packaging, and operating and maintenance wastes. Looking at all of these pieces will show you what the product really costs and that the cheapest purchase price may not really be the least expensive product.
- *Investigate price preferences.* Many local, state, and Federal agencies use price preferences for recycled-content products to overcome both price differences and resistance to trying such products. The State of Alaska has a 5% price preference for recycled -content products purchased for state projects. This includes purchases by state contractors. Contact the Alaska Department of Community and Economic Development, Division of Trade and Development at (907) 269-8110 for information about the price preference.