

Environmentally Preferable Purchasing

This tip sheet corresponds with Green Star Award Standard #3 – Reduce Solid Waste Disposal. Another useful tool is Chapter 5 in “Becoming a Green Star: A Waste Prevention Guide for Anchorage Businesses.” You can find the guide online in pdf and html format at www.greenstarinc.org/guideindex.php or request a hard copy from Green Star.

Why Alter Purchasing Habits?

Purchasing decisions affect all aspects of your operation. Implementing environmentally preferable purchasing will help your organization save money and reduce waste through all stages of a product’s use and disposal.

Environmentally preferable products include products that are durable, reusable, recyclable, less toxic than traditional products, or use less packaging. Environmentally preferable services may take back, exchange and recycle used products as well.

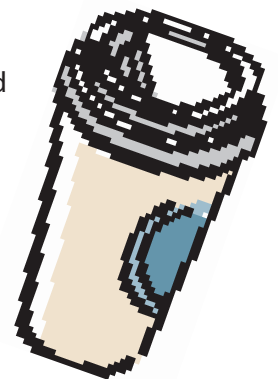
Tips for Purchasing

- Buy recyclable products or packaging so you can send waste to a recycler instead of to the landfill. For example, purchase light bulbs packaged in recyclable paperboard boxes rather than non-recyclable plastic “blister packs.” Or purchase beverages for employees in aluminum cans or #1 PET bottles instead of #5 or #7 plastic jugs that are not recyclable.
- Work with your suppliers to identify waste-preventing products. Suppliers can provide information about recycled-content products, help reduce excess packaging, and recommend durable products.
- Purchase office equipment and other appliances that are USEPA ENERGY STAR-rated. Find out more at www.epa.gov/energystar.
- Lease office equipment rather than buy so that you can easily upgrade without having to manage the old equipment.
- Purchase non-perishables and commonly used products in bulk and select products with the least packaging to reduce packaging waste.
- If you buy in bulk, be sure to store your products properly so they are not damaged before they are put to use. For example, copy paper should be stored in a cool, dry area and should not have heavy items stored on top that could bend it and make it jam in a copier or printer.

Bulk Isn’t Always Bulk

Keep in mind that many of the “bulk” products offered at Costco and Sam’s Club are simply regular-sized products in their standard packaging sold together – usually in an outer plastic wrap or box -- to appear that they are bulk. This actually increases the amount of packaging per unit. Examples of true bulk products include sacks of flour or sugar purchased for a bakery and stored in large air-tight reusable totes; paper in large, reamless boxes (rather than wrapped 500 sheets to a ream) for offices that use paper quickly; or motor oil purchased in 55-gallon drums for a large vehicle maintenance facility.

- Purchase durable products that will last longer. These may cost more initially, but over time will save money and reduce waste. For example, if you shovel a lot of snow around your workplace in winter, purchase a strong, durable, metal or thick plastic shovel that will not break. It will cost less than purchasing three or four less expensive, poorer quality shovels throughout the season.
- Purchase reusable items. For example, use ceramic mugs instead of disposable foam or paper cups. In business meetings, lunches, and conferences, use real plates and forks instead of plastic or paper. Keep a travel mug handy for trips to the coffee shop.
- When purchasing new equipment or office furniture, donate old items to non-profits, schools, churches, or thrift shops that can reuse or sell them.



Comprehensive Procurement Guidelines

If you are in the military or work for a federal agency, guidelines exist for some of your purchasing habits. Procuring agencies that spend more than \$10,000 a year on a designated item are required to purchase recycled products.

Procuring agencies are federal, state, and local agencies, and their contractors, that use appropriated federal funds. For example, if a city agency spends more than \$10,000 a year on a USEPA-designated item, and part of that money is from appropriated federal funds, then the agency must purchase that item made from recovered materials, within reason. Some exceptions do exist.

Designated items include specific construction, landscaping, paper, office, parks and recreation, transportation, vehicular, and miscellaneous products. For a complete list of designated products, visit www.epa.gov/cpg.

- Consult the Alaska Materials Exchange for quality used items. The exchange includes metals, plastics, chemicals, electronics/computers, office supplies, furniture, construction materials, and many other categories. You can list your own items on the exchange for free as well as check the exchange periodically for specific materials you may need. The Alaska Materials Exchange is available at www.greenstarinc.org/ame/ameindex.php.
- Use recycled-content products. The success of recycling depends not only on filling recycling bins with aluminum and paper, but also on the development and support of recycled-product markets. New products made from recycled materials are developed almost daily and a wide variety of recycled products are now readily available in Anchorage. Be sure to check your office supply catalogs or ask vendors for recycled products. Many vendors have sections within their catalogs specifically for recycled products or place a symbol next to recycled products in their catalogs.

- When looking for recycled-content products, look for the highest percentage of post-consumer waste. Pre-consumer or post-industrial waste is simply scrap from the manufacturing process that is tossed back in. Post-consumer waste means that it has been used by a real person and put into a recycling bin, then sent back to the manufacturing facility to be used again. While both types are good, looking for post-consumer content helps to support recycling programs.



- Don't believe the recycled paper myths. Paper companies are making high quality recycled paper stock that's much more attractive and performs better than the first generation of recycled papers. Good quality recycled paper is no worse for printers and copiers than good quality virgin paper. If your paper is dusty or jams the printer, look for another brand before blaming it on recycled paper.

Recycled-Content Products

Samples of office products that can be found with recovered or recycled content:

Letterhead and stationery
Copy and computer paper
File folders and hanging folders
Toilet tissue and paper towels
Envelopes and business cards
Binders and report covers
"Post-It" notes and dispensers
Trash and recycling bins
Plastic desktop accessories
Cardboard boxes



Also consider construction and landscaping products like acoustical tiles, cellulose insulation* and hydroseed mulch* (both made locally in Anchorage), composite lumber and more.

*Thermo-Kool of Alaska, Inc., 563-3644



5011 Spenard Road, Bldg, A, Suite 204, Anchorage, AK 99517

Phone: (907) 278-7827 ~ Fax: (907) 279-5868

info@greenstarinc.org ~ www.greenstarinc.org

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