



Green Government

An initiative of the National Association of Counties

Green Purchasing in County Offices

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● Introduction

Whether your county is already examining the energy use of its building(s), seeking LEED certification (Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design designation from the U.S. Green Building Council), or just beginning to think about “going green,” establishing an internal plan to purchase environmentally-preferable office products can be a significant step toward achieving cost and environmental savings.

Local and state governments combined, purchase more than \$1 trillion of goods and services each year. Green purchases can help your county save money, reduce harmful environmental impacts, improve worker safety, and generate publicity and educational opportunities in your community. For example, in 2007, King County, WA agencies purchased \$41 million of environmentally-preferable products, saving an estimated \$877,000 compared to the cost of conventional products.

● What is Green Purchasing?

In Mecklenburg County, NC the county’s green purchasing policy defines environmentally-preferable products as: Environmentally-preferable goods and services are those that have a lesser or reduced effect on human health and the environment when specifically compared with other goods and services that serve the same purpose.

In general, environmentally-preferable products:

- contain fewer hazardous chemicals,
- use resources more efficiently,
- reduce waste, and
- are energy efficient.

An indicator that a product meets environmental goals is if the product displays an eco-label or, a third-party accepted “seal of approval” including: EcoLogo, ENERGY STAR, Electronic Product Environmental Assessment Tool (EPEAT), Forest Stewardship Council, GREENGUARD and Green



Seal (see the Additional Resources section for further information on these labels and the Consumer Reports Eco-Labels Center).

● Purchasing Impacts

Office purchases can have environmental impacts including:

- paper from forests,
- greenhouse gases from office technology, heating, lighting, air travel, commuting and deliveries,
- waste from offices, shipping, receiving, and cafeterias,
- inefficient water use internally and disposal of products that do not safely biodegrade,
- use of chemicals in manufacturing processes and potential impact on workers,
- harmful chemicals in cleaning and janitorial supplies, and
- disposal of electronics and other potentially hazardous items at ‘end of life.’

These environmental impacts are not just created by the composition of the product. Impacts on the environment also occur in the way in which the product is transported, packaged, and even the greenness of the manufacturing plant that produced the product.

In 2004, the Mecklenburg County Board of Commissioners adopted the Environmental Leadership Policy. In 2007, the county’s green purchasing efforts resulted in 991 tons

of virgin wood saved from being cut; 2,244 pounds of air pollutants avoided; 153,372 kilowatt-hours of energy not required; and 261,856 gallons of water from being utilized.

● Principles for Greening Purchasing

The definition of green purchases will vary for each county depending on the environmental, social, and economic goals. It is important to explore the goals of your county in having a green purchasing policy before you begin to develop it.

After identifying your county’s green purchasing goals, consider any number of the following practices...

- ask vendors for a product’s environmental performance information,
- replace hazardous products, such as cleaning supplies, with a safer product or process,
- standardize purchases so leftover products are shared with other departments,
- increase the efficiency of procurement procedures to eliminate unnecessary and/or duplicate purchases,
- look for local products that meet your needs,
- order supplies in bulk to help reduce greenhouse gas emissions from deliveries,
- favor the purchase of durable, energy-efficient and recycled-content products,
- reduce the number of days your regular suppliers deliver to your buildings (for example, if they deliver daily now, reduce it to one or two days per week) to reduce greenhouse gas emissions from deliveries,
- purchase safer, more environmentally friendly products (for example, biodegradable liquids, packaging and products that are “certified non-toxic”),
- look for opportunities to reuse, repair, lease and/or share equipment such as



remanufactured ink and toner cartridges (King County, WA saved an estimated \$275,000 in 2007 thanks to this effort),

- reduce unnecessary print jobs and use double-sided printing as often as possible,
- turn off computers and install energy efficient lights to save energy,
- recycle wherever possible, and
- educate your employees, community and local media about how they too can “go green.”

● Implementation

After defining your county’s desired outcomes and impacts of your green purchasing goals (the backbone to your policy), it is time to identify how you will get there. Often-times, purchasing within county governments can be decentralized across departments and agencies, with many individuals having authority to make purchasing decisions. A first step, therefore, is to inventory your current purchasing roles and practices. It is important to know what is currently being purchased and how.

Establishing a green county team (see the NACo Creating a Green County Team fact sheet available at www.greencounties.org for more information) will help you get the most accurate inventory of current procedures. This team also ensures that a diverse group of individuals from throughout the county are involved in providing feedback and communicating messages back to all levels within the government. Note: be sure to acknowledge and reward staff members throughout the process who play a lead role in implementing the new purchasing policy.

In King County, WA an Agency Liaison Network was established through its renowned Environmental Purchasing Program. The county uses the network of liaisons within different agencies to provide users with information on environmentally-preferable products and processes. The liaisons help reach

Start Buying Green Products Today!

U.S. Communities Green Purchasing Program is the one-stop source for public agency access to a broad line of environmentally certified products and services. From ENERGY STAR to EcoLogo to Green Seal, U.S. Communities Green Purchasing Program has identified those items in its contracts that meet third-party environmental certification standards to help public agencies meet their responsible procurement needs.

Supplier	Commodity
Office Depot	Office/School Supplies Print Services Remanufactured Toner Cartridges & Toner Cartridge Recycling
Haworth; Herman Miller; Knoll; KI	Office Furniture
Virco	School Furniture
GTSI, Inc.	Technology Solutions
Tech Depot	Technology Products
Graybar	Electrical, Telecommunications & Data
ZEP Manufacturing Co.	Janitorial Supplies
GVS/Astroturf	Synthetic Turf & Athletic Surfaces
AutoZone	Auto Parts & Accessories
Ricoh Americas Inc	Office Machines
HD Supply; The Home Depot	Maintenance & Hardware Supplies
HCS	Roofing Supplies & Services
Hagemeyer NA	Homeland Security Solutions
Gametime; Landscape Structures; Little Tikes	Parks & Playgrounds
Sportime	P.E. Supplies

the appropriate individuals doing the daily work and help the county better understand the roles and functions within each unit. King County’s Environmental Purchasing Program also produces bulletins to over 1,000 individuals on environmentally preferable products, events, contracts, and other resources. (For more information visit: www.metrokc.gov/procure/green/)

While many environmentally-preferable products are cost-competitive - if not cheaper than traditional products - in some cases they may be more expensive likely due to lower production volumes. Consider designating an environmentally-safer product as the first, or default, option. You may want to incorporate flexibility in your policy and provide environmental products a small price preference

(such as 10%) in such instances. When prices drop, you can eliminate this price preference.

Another important cost-benefit consideration is with products such as equipment. Considering lifecycle costs (the cost over a product’s life) of the equipment is imperative. While these products may have a higher price tag, increased costs may be paid back in the form of reduced bills, maintenance and operation costs.

In Alameda County, CA, the Waste Management Authority developed the following Sample Implementation Work Plan to go along with its Model Environmentally Preferable Purchasing (EPP) Policy:

Step 1 Options:

- Create Green Team(s)
- Create an Action Plan, Target List or EPP Goals List. Include timeline, point of contact for each item or goal (see following Sample EPP Goals List from the US Environmental Protection Agency, USEPA). This could be by department, product, or product category (i.e. green cleaners)
- Identify one or more EPP Champions

Step 2 Options:

- Evaluate current purchases
- Educate or train staff
- Review and modify current and upcoming bids and contracts
- Test environmentally preferable products
- Track environmentally-preferable purchases

- Seek opportunities for cooperative purchasing
- Outline services provided in-house and services needed from StopWaste.Org. Identify point of contact for each service:
 - Education or training sessions
 - Tracking systems
 - Reviewing contracts and writing specifications
 - Setting up pilot testing of proposed environmentally preferable product(s)
 - Working with service provider(s) to review an environmentally preferable product(s)
 - Inventorying current purchases
 - Participating on Green Team(s)
 - Identifying target products or action items



Conclusion

Green purchasing policies go beyond the old buy-recycled products viewpoint and incorporate even more environmentally-preferable aspects – everything from energy efficient equipment to furniture and carpeting. In developing a green purchasing policy

Common Green Purchasing Definitions

When creating an environmental purchasing policy for your county, you will encounter a number of technical terms and descriptions. Here we offer definitions for some of the more common terms in county purchasing policies.

Acute Toxicity - chemical that is toxic with only one or minimal exposure

Available locally - one or more businesses within the county/city or immediate surrounding areas are able to provide goods and services in a timely manner, and in sufficient quantity and quality to meet a specific department/agency need.

Bio-based - product ingredients derived from plants, as opposed to petroleum.

Biodegradable - ability of a substance, material, or product ingredient to readily decompose by the action of microbes.

Carcinogen - a substance that causes cancer.

Chlorinated solvents - these solvents are typically found in cleaning and degreasing products. Chlorinated solvents can contribute air and water pollution, depletion of the ozone layer, and are toxic.

Chronic toxicity - chemical that is toxic over continual/repeated exposure.

Environmentally-preferable products and services - as defined by Presidential Executive Order 13101, means products and services that have a lesser or reduced effect on human health and the environment when compared to competing products and services that serve the same purpose. This applies to raw material acquisition, as well as product manufacturing, distribution, use, operation, maintenance, and disposal.

Hazardous Materials - any material that, because of their quantity, concentration, or physical or chemical characteristics, pose a significant hazard to human health and safety or to the environment.

Integrated Pest Management - use of a combination of pest control methods including prevention, improved sanitation, mechanical, physical, biological, or chemical techniques to reduce insect, animal, and plant pests in the least toxic manner.

Post-consumer recycled material - material generated from residential/ commercial waste and used as a raw material in manufacturing of recycled products.

Price-preference - percentage of increase in price that your county will pay to obtain a designated product or service.

Processed-chlorine free paper - paper that is manufactured using a percentage of

post-consumer recycled paper fiber (that may contain residues of chlorine) and is whitened without adding chlorine or chlorine derivatives. Paper manufacturing that uses chlorine or chlorine compounds creates toxic by-products that can pollute water resources.

Product lifecycle considerations - refers to the environmental effects of a product through raw materials acquisition, manufacturing, distribution, use, maintenance and disposal.

Recyclable - material or product that can be reprocessed, remanufactured, or reused.

Sustainable Building Practices - incorporation of environmental, health, and waste prevention criteria in building design, site-planning and preparation, construction materials acquisition, construction or remodeling, deconstruction, and waste disposal.

Toxic Release Inventory - national data base from USEPA of information about toxic chemicals that are being used, manufactured, treated, transported, or released into the environment by certain facilities and reported on annual basis. Available online at www.epa.gov/tri.

Volatile Organic Compounds (VOCs) - chemicals that readily evaporate and contribute to the formation of air pollution when released into the atmosphere. Many VOC's are classified as toxic and carcinogenic.

Member companies of the NACo Green Government Initiative can help you with your county's green office purchasing efforts. Contact any of the following:

● Office Depot

www.officedepot.com/buygreen

Office Depot provides more office products to more customers in more countries than any other company. With over \$4.3 billion in online sales, the company is also the world's third largest e-retailer. Long recognized as an environmental leader in the office products industry, Office Depot has an environmental strategy to increasingly "buy green, be green and sell green". Two examples of how the company "sells green" to customers is its "Green Book" catalog of environmentally preferable products and online green storefront.

● U.S. Communities Government Purchasing Alliance

www.uscommunities.org/gpa/green

U.S. Communities, a government purchasing alliance of over 87,000 public agencies, is the premier strategic sourcing solution

for environmentally friendly products and services. From ENERGY STAR to Envirochoice to Green Seal, U.S. Communities/Green has identified those items in its contracts that meet third-party environmental certification standards to help public agencies meet their responsible procurement needs.

● Wal-Mart

www.walmartfacts.com or www.walmart-stores.com

With more than 4,000 units in the United States and another 2,900 stores across the globe, Wal-Mart is the world's largest retailer. Who better than Wal-Mart to develop and implement practices that are good for the environment and good for business? At Wal-Mart, being an efficient and profitable business and being a good steward of the environment are goals that work together. The environmental goals at Wal-Mart are simple and straightforward: To be supplied 100% by renewable energy; to create zero waste; and to sell products that sustain resources and the environment.

● Waste Management (WM)

www.WMLampTracker.com or www.ThinkGreenFromHome.com

WM LampTracker offers an environmentally friendly recycling solution for fluorescent lamps and CFL's (contain small amounts of mercury). The Mercury VaporLok® box within a foil bag within a box reduces the risk of mercury exposure during collection, storage and shipment of fluorescent lamps and CFL's. The containers are USDOT/United Nations certified for hazardous waste and can be transported by both UPS and FedEx Ground. Containers are tracked from time of order through recycling with complete documentation available online. Containers come in various sizes.

it is important to set realistic purchasing goals that meet the environmental, social, and economic needs of the county. As prices increase and decrease with time and new products enter the market, continuous monitoring and evaluation of green purchasing efforts is an essential aspect to the ongoing success of the county's policy.

Incremental approaches coupled with continual staff involvement will ensure proper implementation and evaluation. For example, in Hennepin County, MN the county's green purchasing program emphasizes a multi-faceted approach, including resolutions, workshops, project teams, designated standards and technical assistance. And, Alameda County, CA suggests annual reports might include anecdotal information from staff on the performance, safety, cost, and environmental benefits achieved through the use of the environmentally preferable products.



Visit www.greencounties.org

● Additional Resources

● Consumer Reports Eco-Label Center

www.greenerchoices.org/eco-labels/

Using the search tools provided a user can obtain Consumer Reports' evaluation of labels on food, wood, personal care products and household cleaners. The site is searchable by product, category, or certifier, and easily compares labels using report cards.

● EcoLogo

www.ecologo.org

EcoLogo is North America's most widely recognized and respected certification of environmental leadership. By setting standards and certifying products in more than 120 categories, EcoLogo helps you identify, trust, buy, and sell environmentally preferable ("green") goods and services.

● Electronic Product Environmental Assessment Tool (EPEAT)

www.epeat.net

Products in more than 50 categories are eligible for the ENERGY STAR. They use less energy, save money, and help protect the environment. ENERGY STAR is a joint program of the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency and the U.S. Department of Energy helping us all save money and protect the environment through energy efficient products and practices. EPA provides strategies, tools, professional assistance, and recognition opportunities to help you meet your county goals and contribute to ENERGY STAR's nationwide challenge to improve the energy efficiency of facilities by 10% or more.

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www.energystar.gov

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● Environmentally Preferable Purchasing

www.epa.gov/epp

Environmentally Preferable Purchasing (EPP) helps the federal government "buy green," and in doing so, uses the federal government's enormous buying power to stimulate market demand for green products and services. Geared first to help federal purchasers, this site can help green vendors, businesses large and small -- and consumers.

● Forest Stewardship Council

www.fsc.org

The Forest Stewardship Council (FSC) is an international organization that brings people together to find solutions which promote responsible stewardship of the world's forests. Through consultative processes, it sets international standards for responsible forest management. It accredits independent third party organizations who can certify forest managers and forest product producers to FSC standards.

● Green Seal

www.greenseal.org

Green Seal is an independent non-profit organization dedicated to safeguarding the environment and transforming the marketplace by promoting the manufacture, purchase, and use of environmentally responsible products and services. Green Seal certifies everything from coffee filters to air chillers.

● Greenguard Environmental Institute

www.greenguard.org

Greenguard Environmental Institute (GEI) is an industry-independent, non-profit organization that oversees the GREENGUARD Certification Program. GEI establishes acceptable indoor air standards for indoor products, environments, and buildings. GEI's mission is to improve public health and quality of life through programs that improve indoor air.

● North American Green Purchasing Initiative

www.nagpi.net

The North American Green Purchasing Initiative (NAGPI) is made up of major groups and agencies working with green purchasing in North America. NAGPI is housed at the Commission for Environmental Cooperation. Its efforts include work to compile and maintain a list of ongoing green purchasing activities; to create a unified voice to engage manufacturers, purchasers, politicians, the media and the general public; and to develop and maintain a database of supporting tools and procurement policies used across North America.

● Paper Calculator

www.papercalculator.org

This tool, available from Environmental Defense, helps quantify the benefits of better paper choices. The calculator shows the environmental impacts of different papers across their full lifecycle.

● Responsible Purchasing Network

www.responsiblepurchasing.org

The Responsible Purchasing Network (RPN) is a national network of procurement-related professionals dedicated to socially responsible and environmentally sustainable purchasing. RPN provides comprehensive, step-by-step resources and purchasing guides. The program is staffed and managed by the Center for a New American Dream.

About the NACo Green Government Initiative

The NACo Green Government Initiative serves as a catalyst between local governments and the private sector to facilitate green government practices, products and policies that result in financial and environmental savings. Launched in 2007, the Initiative provides comprehensive resources for local governments on all things green, including energy, green building, air quality, transportation, water quality, land use, purchasing and recycling.

For more information contact Kelly Zonderwyk, NACo Senior Community Services Associate, at 202.942.4224 or kzonderwyk@naco.org.

