

# Closing the Circle News

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## Environmentally Preferable Purchasing

### Start With What You Know

**G**reen purchasing gives us the opportunity to positively affect the environmental impacts of the products and services that we commonly use. Federal agencies have established programs for purchasing energy-efficient and energy-saving products, recycled content products, and products and services with other, beneficial environmental attributes. Now we are moving toward purchasing products and services with multiple environmental attributes. Identifying and finding these products and services can be more complex than finding single attribute products but not impossible. How do you attack this problem in a systematic, practical, and cost-effective manner? Start with what you know.

Executive Order 13101 directs agencies to use environmentally preferable products and services and to implement cost effective procurement preference programs favoring the purchase of these products and services. So what is environmentally preferable purchasing (EPP) and how does this differ from requirements to buy recycled content products or energy efficient products?

Most "green" purchasing programs focus on single attribute products such as recycled content, energy efficiency, or no ozone depleting substances. EPP looks at multiple environmental attributes. In fact, "environmentally preferable" means products or services that have a lesser or reduced effect on human health and the environment when compared with competing products or services that serve the same purpose. EPP, therefore, is more a process than a product. The determination of what these products are is based more on the willingness of the business community and government agencies to become stewards of future populations and/or their children's futures. As we all know, all consumables have some effect on the environment, either positive or negative. It is up to each and every one of us to do everything in our power to make as much positive impact as possible.

OK, so how do we do this with environmentally preferable products and services? In an ideal

world, we would know the environmental impact of every product or service throughout its life cycle, which would consider raw materials acquisition, production, manufacturing, packaging, distribution, reuse, operation, maintenance, or disposal of the product or service. Then we would just pick the product or service that had the least adverse effect on the environment. Unfortunately, we don't have all that information available to make an intelligent decision. Coming up with that detailed type of information on all required products or services would be an intensive, time-consuming effort that would stop all purchasing, if we had to wait to get that information before making a purchase. Even if we had all of that information, we would still have to come up with some method of integrating it into a usable product. For instance, while an end product might result in less toxic emissions than a competing product, its production may have resulted in more toxic emissions to the environment than the competing product.

So how do we proceed from a practical standpoint? We start with what we know. For some products, we know their energy ratings. For others, we know their toxicity levels. For others, we know that EPA has recommended recycled content levels. We may know that they contain volatile organic compounds (VOCs), ozone depleting substances, or toxic or hazardous constituents. The lists of environmental considerations are endless, and they may even change from one location to the next. For instance, water conservation is more critical in dry areas of the U.S. Smog reduction is more important in cities in ozone non-attainment areas.

EPP is like traveling along a spiral line from the middle of the spiral outward. We start in the middle with what we know - in other words, with readily available information on environmental attributes. We can ask whether any given product is an EPA-designated recycled content product or an Energy Star® product or a product containing

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# Looking for Additional EPP Pioneers and Pilot Projects

***" Agencies are encouraged to immediately test and evaluate the principles and concepts contained in EPA's Guidance on Environmentally Preferable Purchasing through pilot projects..."***

***(E.O. 13101, Section 503 (b)).***

***As the examples highlighted in this issue illustrate, a number of pioneering agencies have put environmentally preferable purchasing concepts into practice to make smarter buying decisions - both from an economic as well as environmental perspective. I would like to see many more agencies try a pilot project. I challenge each agency to initiate a pilot by the end of this calendar year, to be counted among the small but growing numbers charting new territory in "green" purchasing.***

***- Fran McPoland  
Federal Environmental  
Executive***

## Accepting Proposals for EPP Pilot Projects

If interested, please contact the EPP Program for an application form at: [pilot.epp@epa.gov](mailto:pilot.epp@epa.gov). A modest amount of seed money is available to fund projects.\* Projects should be tied to an upcoming procurement. Due date for applications will be: October 31, 2000.

EPA's EPP Program offers a number of tools to assist Federal agencies with environmentally preferable purchasing. See EPA's website for the tools, [www.epa.gov/oppt/epp/tools](http://www.epa.gov/oppt/epp/tools) and a chart of the existing pilot projects, <http://www.epa.gov/opptintr/epp/fedpilotprojects.html>.

\*Funds cannot be used to purchase products.

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alternatives to ozone depleting substances. Why? Because parameters have been defined for these products by EPA or by DOE's Federal Energy Management Program. We then move outward on the spiral to environmental attributes for which parameters may or may not be readily available. These include toxics, heavy metals, and VOC content. Farther out on the spiral are attributes for which information is limited, such as carcinogenicity or endocrine disrupters. Each time that we can learn about and specify attributes that are farther out on the spiral, we also are moving our EPP knowledge base farther along the spiral as well. Thus, EPP is constantly evolving.

As noted, some environmental attributes have already been defined by EPA or DOE programs. There also are many third party organizations and governmental agencies that have established environmental guidelines to assist in gathering this information (e.g., Green Seal, Scientific Certification Systems, Forest Stewardship Council, Chlorine Free Products Association).

EPP will not occur overnight, but through diligent efforts, you can begin to expand your knowledge of relevant environmental attributes. Start with what you know, and constantly seek to improve upon it. To move all of us along the EPP spiral, share your information with others through

electronic listservs, professional organizations, seminars, and committees. Seek out the lead agencies on this issue. The White House Task Force on Recycling, EPA, DoD, DLA, DOE, and numerous third party agencies are all excellent sources of information and conduits for sharing of information. You can make a difference if you "start with what you know" and improve upon the process every day.

Here are a couple of examples of how this is applied in the real world, and how one person is making a difference. Mr. Robert Cox from the Pentagon, Department of Defense, Washington Headquarters Services, Real Estate & Facilities Directorate has been a pioneer in the development of strategies for the procurement of environmentally preferable products and services for construction activities. Guided by mandates to practice EPP, Robert Cox telephoned EPA in 1995 for assistance on how to "buy green" in repairing and renovating a parking lot. That simple telephone call led to a partnership between EPA and DoD concerning EPP projects. The team established two pilot EPP construction projects: (1) the \$1.1 billion Pentagon Interior Renovation Project, and (2) the parking lot repair project, including the Pentagon parking lot, which is one of the largest surface parking lots in the country.

This team started with "what they knew." They researched

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the market to assess which known environmental attributes of the many available products could be cited in the construction specifications. Their objective was to locate products that met cost and performance requirements and reflected as many environmentally preferable attributes as possible. Once the team found products that met the criteria, DoD specified the environmental attributes of the products in the contract documents. This established the baseline environmental descriptions of acceptable environmentally preferable products. To further "green" these projects, DoD adopted innovative contract language to encourage repair companies to use products with improved environmental performance for the parking lot project. DoD also included special bid evaluation language requiring contractors to practice environmentally preferable purchasing as a part of their proposal to renovate interior spaces in the Pentagon.

The final parking lot project included recycled asphalt, recycled crumb rubber joint sealants, concrete containing ground blast furnace slag, low VOC paints, and many more. Environmentally preferable products and services purchased

with the interior renovations contract included wood doors and moldings from certified well managed forests, recycled-content ceiling tiles, and recycled construction and demolition debris.

The information acquired through the submittal process has been used in follow-on contracts and as a general reference for the availability of environmentally preferable products. Both contracts also required extensive construction debris recycling. As a result of these efforts the Pentagon has been able to quantify the types of environmentally preferable products used in these projects. However the process hasn't stopped there. Mr. Cox continually "spirals out" the database of knowledge through continuing environmental evaluation of alternative products and services from a multiple attribute, life cycle perspective.

You, too, can "start with what you know" and continue the process of moving along the EPP knowledge spiral outward into an ever-improving universe of information on environmentally preferable products. Can an individual make a difference that positively impacts the environment? Mr. Cox made a difference. So can you! The challenge is in your hands, and the hands of future generations.

## Guest Editorial

# "Green" Products Momentum Grows...

By Jeffrey Hollender, President, Seventh Generation®

**T**he year 2000 marks the 10th anniversary of the widespread introduction of environmentally preferable products into the marketplace. A trend that first appeared in the wake of resurgent national environmental concern triggered by Earth Day 1990, the "green products" category has been growing ever since and, in the view of many observers, is now poised for a major breakthrough.

No company is better able to offer perspective on the past, present and future of the industry than Seventh Generation, the Burlington, Vermont-based marketer of environmentally preferable household products. Since 1988, well before the term "green product" entered the national vocabulary, Seventh Generation has been selling 100 percent recycled content household paper products containing 70-10 percent postconsumer content and made without chlorine bleach (processed chlorine free); phosphate-free cleaning and laundry products that are biobased, and contain biodegradable ingredients; and trash bags made from 80 percent recycled post-consumer plastic.

For the last four years, Seventh Generation's sales have grown an average of 40 percent per year, a reflection of growth patterns in the natural products industry at large. Though sales in the traditional supermarket industry

remained essentially flat during the 1990s, the natural foods industry grew 19 percent per year, increasing its growth rate to 25 percent in 1996. According to SPINS (what is this?) Scan data, the growth rate of natural cleaning products increased from 19.5 percent in 1997 to 25.9 percent in 1998. From relative obscurity in the late 80s, environmentally preferable products have become a \$46 billion global industry propelled by a greater and more sophisticated consumer awareness of health and environmental issues.

Increased sales have allowed companies to take advantage of manufacturing efficiencies and new technologies that have lowered prices to more acceptable levels. New competition has maintained these prices and forced manufacturers to improve their products. Seventh Generation's own independent lab tests, for example, show that most of its reformulated products now perform as well as their mainstream counterparts.

Marketers like Seventh Generation have also altered their marketing focus to broaden their products' appeal. Once a seller of "products for a healthy planet", today

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## ...but Challenges Remain

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Seventh Generation offers products that are "safer for you and the environment". This shift has allowed the company to extend its reach beyond environmentally concerned consumers, to a wider audience of consumers focused on health and safety. This focus is very similar to that found in Executive Order 13101, which defines "environmentally preferable products" as having a lesser or reduced effect on human health and the environment when compared with competing products.

In spite of all the recent good news for the green products industry, however, Seventh Generation believes important challenges remain.

Many consumers' perceptions of green products are still colored by negative experiences with those that appeared in the early 1990s. Products that were rushed to market in order to quickly capitalize on that era's outpouring of environmental concern were often poor performers or failed to deliver meaningful environmental benefits. Debacles like biodegradable trash bags that weren't actually biodegradable, and cleaners that often couldn't get the job done, left many believing the product category as a whole was either inferior or simply a sham.

In terms of products made from post-consumer recycled materials, it's been a struggle to help people understand that the costs for these feedstocks are often higher than the costs for virgin raw materials. These postconsumer materials often demand a seemingly ironic premium representing higher processing costs. Yet when compared to the full life-cycle costs (including production and disposal, as well as environmental damage) associated with virgin materials, recycled materials are economically superior. Getting consumers to understand these important points remains a challenge, albeit one lessened by federal purchasing leadership.

Fortunately, consumer research shows that the public remains, at least in principle, willing to factor such environmental benefits into their purchases. A recent survey by Porter Novelli, for example, reported that 79 percent of the public believes that measurable environmental progress could be achieved if everyone made "a few small changes." When asked to pick from a list of activities they'd be willing to do to help, the most frequently selected response was "buy environmentally friendly products like recycled paper products." Similarly, a

1997 Cambridge Report found that 78 percent of those surveyed think that "recycling used products into new products is absolutely essential".

Seventh Generation believes the key to translating these general beliefs into concrete consumer behavior lies in education. Communicating the crucial distinctions between pre-consumer, products and post-consumer, recycled content products, for example, could create a demand for preferable postconsumer goods. An understanding of the problems created by chlorine paper bleaching could stimulate a demand for chlorine-free alternatives. Initiatives like the Department of the Interior's recent janitorial contract stipulating the use chlorine-free, recycled content paper products help foster such educational efforts and subsequent demand.

Where cleaning products are concerned, education must continue as well, a conclusion born out by Seventh Generation's own research. The company's 1999 survey of attitudes towards such products reveal a false sense of security green products manufacturers will need to overcome. Nearly 9 out of 10 people, for example, incorrectly believed that safety testing is required before cleaning products can be sold and that manufacturers are required to list all ingredients on product labels. Believing mainstream cleaning products to be completely safe, only 51 percent were willing to purchase a green alternative. These figures are echoed by research for the EPA's Consumer Labeling Initiative Phase 2, which found, for example, that 60 percent don't check product labels for harmful ingredients before purchase. Of the 40 percent who do inspect labels, just 47 percent (roughly 20 percent of all respondents) do so out of concern for their health. Of those who said they never read product labels, 31 percent said it was because they didn't need to know about ingredients. Correcting such misperceptions is the key to creating large scale demand for environmentally preferable products.

Seventh Generation believes that the green products industry will continue to grow dramatically. As collective efforts continue to educate consumers about both the environmental costs of traditional products and the benefits of "green" alternatives, consumer demand for such products will inevitably increase. When consumers come to recognize the part they play in creating a sustainable civilization, green products will become the choice of the vast majority of Americans.

# Copier Paper: Moving Beyond Recycled Content

**B**ecause the concept of environmentally preferable purchasing is still new, we are only just beginning to understand and test its potential as a vehicle for encouraging greater environmental stewardship. Pilot purchases enable us to learn how to identify multiple environmental attributes and compare products or services across these attributes. When setting out to undertake a pilot project, it is important to make sure your time and effort are well spent. There are a number of factors that can help make sure you get the most out of your EPP pilot efforts:

- Is the product or service widely purchased in your agency or throughout government?
- Will changing the environmental attributes of the product or service have a significant environmental impact?

- Is there existing information on the environmental attributes and on available alternatives?
- Will you have agency and management support?
- Is there potential to leverage your purchase - by joining with other agencies, for example?

When all of these factors are maximized, your pilot effort will be well spent and widely replicable throughout the government. The time spent on the pilot should be commensurate with the potential for environmental gains, in order to ensure that purchasing of the product or service will have a large impact and be worthwhile. A good example is the difference between the evaluation and purchase of environmentally preferable paper clips vs. environmentally preferable paper. Copier paper is one of those products in particular that maximize the factors listed above and make it a worthwhile choice for consideration while paper clips likely would not.

Paper accounts for 38 percent of the municipal solid waste generated annually in the United States. It is a good candidate for an environmentally preferable purchasing (EPP) pilot because it is used very widely throughout government, is associated with a number of environmental impacts of concern and, for the most part, is still purchased centrally and in large quantities at once. There is a good deal of available information on various pertinent environmental attributes, and there is agency support for a pilot paper purchase.

Following is a discussion of the copier paper pilot project led by EPA. This has been a more complex project than most EPP pilots because the pilot group had to address non-environmental economic, legal, and logistics issues as well as a sensitive environmental attribute - the human health and environmental impacts of the use of chlorine to bleach paper. However, it demonstrates that, with perseverance, it is possible to identify multiple environmental attributes for commonly used products such as copier paper.

By 1997, a number of Federal agencies in the National Capital Region had been purchasing a 100 percent recycled fiber copier paper. This product was discontinued by its manufacturer. The agencies were interested in purchasing a replacement copier paper with additional environmentally preferable characteristics beyond the 20 and 30 percent postconsumer standard already established by Executive Order 12873. EPA's EPP Program convened a pilot committee to evaluate options for replacing the 100 percent recycled content copier paper with another environmentally preferable paper, making sure that agencies' performance and recycling needs were addressed in the evaluation. EPA also hoped to help navigate agencies through the maze of terms used to describe various bleaching technologies.

EPA's Air and Water Offices were completing new

regulations for pulp and paper mills, known as the "Cluster Rule." These offices lent their technical expertise to the pilot project, as did several other EPA program offices and the Government Printing Office (GPO). GPO participated as the coordinator and lead for all DC-based Federal agency paper purchasing. Other agencies participating as paper purchasers included Interior, Justice, Energy, and the Defense Automated Printing Service (DAPS).

We began by looking at and prioritizing the life cycle impacts of pulp and papermaking. It was decided early on that a postconsumer content level higher than the 30 percent level set by the Executive Order would be preferable. Also deemed preferable would be a paper bleached with alternatives to chlorine. Chlorine use is associated with the production and release of dioxin, an extremely persistent, bio-accumulative, toxic, and possibly carcinogenic substance. The group also considered alternative fibers, such as agricultural residues or fibers, but determined that papers made from these fibers were either priced too high or were not available in sufficient quantities at that time.

We went through several iterations of considering appropriate environmental attributes as we addressed each of the many economic, political, technical, and logistical challenges that surfaced along the way. The earliest challenge was the lack of supply of a chlorine-free, higher postconsumer content copier paper. We also needed to make sure the incentive we created for chlorine-free bleaching was consistent with the incentives approach in EPA's "Cluster Rule," which was designed to encourage industry to eliminate chlorine usage in all of its forms, instead of switching from elemental chlorine to chlorine dioxide.

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One of the largest technical challenges faced was learning that best management practices for treating water effluents associated with managing water pollutants could be just as, if not more important, than the bleaching technology to accomplish the goal of minimizing or eliminating chlorine-related pollutant releases. The pilot group consulted with EPA's Water Office to identify an indicator pollutant that would be a sufficient measure of chlorine use.

In addition to identifying appropriate environmental attributes, the pilot group discovered a few procurement issues. The group identified an alternative copier paper that met the postconsumer fiber and bleaching attributes. However, because the paper was manufactured in Canada (although using postconsumer fiber from the U.S.), the provisions of the Buy American Act and the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) applied to the proposed procurement. Under the Buy American Act and NAFTA, we would be required to pay an additional six percent price premium if the paper was made by a foreign source and was purchased in amounts costing less than \$25,000 (see sections

25.105 and 25.405 of Part 25 of the Federal Acquisition Regulation). It was not clear that we would be purchasing a large enough volume of paper to exceed \$25,000 and avoid the six percent premium.

The final major hurdle was recently lowered as bright white, chlorine-free, high postconsumer content paper that performs well and is within a reasonable price range with respect to the prices being paid currently for 30 percent postconsumer paper, finally appears to be available from a domestic source. Due to this development, the Combined Federal Agency Copier Paper Pilot Committee is now reconvening itself and possibly augmenting its ranks, to head down the home stretch after a long journey.

Interested agencies will convene to determine the ideal time, from a budgetary standpoint, to procure an appropriate amount of the qualifying papers for the purposes of testing them within each agency. This will be done to develop a comfort level with the performance of the paper and to determine what quantity, if any, each agency may decide to purchase in lieu of 30 percent postconsumer copier paper. The group plans to complete a pilot acquisition before the end of the Federal fiscal year.

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## **New-to-the-World Product Lands in DOI Cafeteria**

**O**ut with the polystyrene and in with a new-to-the-world product, specifically made to minimally impact the environment. Similar earth-friendly messages are spoken at the U.S. Department of the Interior but employees there are actually practicing what they preach. In fact, they are going above and beyond satisfying Executive Order 13101—even on their lunch breaks.

For over a year, DOI headquarters has been testing EarthShell® Corporation's environmentally preferable plates and bowls in its cafeteria. Originally the pilot project, which began on Earth Day 1999, was to run for six months. But due to its success and overwhelming response from DOI employees, the project is continuing. In fact, more than 120,000 plates and bowls have been used thus far.

"Employees aren't asking when the project is going to end; they're asking when we're going to replace the other polystyrene items with products like these," says Kenneth Naser, team leader of the Solid and Hazardous Materials Management Team at DOI. "The project has exceeded expectations. We've literally had no complaints about product performance issues. We've received positive feedback from our employees and emails from companies across the country asking about the products and how to conduct similar projects. Our facility is showcasing what others also have the ability to do," says Naser.

EarthShell, located in Annapolis Junction, Maryland, is supplying the product, which is made primarily from limestone and starch. These ingredients allow the plates and bowls to biodegrade in marine or composting environments.

In fact, the second part of the pilot project involved testing the products' compostability at the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Beltsville, MD Agricultural Research Center. Results from three different composting methods have been very positive. Now, the USDA is conducting plant growth tests with the compost mixture. Results are due this Summer.

"This project has allowed us to reduce the volume of solid waste at our facility and convert some of that waste to valuable compost to be used in soil improvement, erosion prevention, and wildlife habitat restoration," says Naser. "DOI employees should be commended for their enthusiasm and their willingness to separate waste products in specific trash cans, making it easier to compost the products," he says.

In addition to the products' compostability factor, the entire manufacturing process has less impact on the environment compared to traditional packaging. For instance, EarthShell products require less energy to manufacture than paper or polystyrene containers. The process also uses less fossil fuel, produces lower greenhouse gas emissions, and produces lower amounts of a wide variety of air and water emissions.

DOI's cafeteria contractor hopes to replace polystyrene cups, soup containers and cutlery in the future. "Our objective is to 'Green' the cafeteria as much as possible so we can get a more environmentally sensitive operation. The use of these products can greatly reduce the environmental impact of high-volume food service outlets," says Naser.

For more information about the EarthShell Corporation visit the Web site at [www.EarthShell.com](http://www.EarthShell.com).

# Trash Or Treasure?

There are two axioms that apply everywhere in the solid waste management business, but no one was more surprised than Suzanne Smith of the Marine Corps Recruit Depot (MCRD) in San Diego when she discovered how much the axioms applied to MCRD.

The first axiom is that you don't know what is in your waste stream until you get into the dumpsters and see what people are throwing away. Suzanne noticed that the dumpsters at MCRD were exceeding maximum capacity every Thursday at the barracks where a Recruit Training Company was to graduate each Friday.

Concerned and curious, Suzanne started looking in the dumpsters. She was amazed at what she found. There were significant numbers of new or near new towels, wash cloths, sweatshirts, tee shirts, briefs, socks, athletic shorts, athletic and street shoes, web belts, irons, ironing boards and many other miscellaneous items.

All items were either issued to, or purchased by, the recruits so that they could successfully complete recruit training. For a number of reasons, recruits had determined that they did not want to take the items with them to their next duty station.

Further research revealed that the Marine Drill Instructors (DI) were aware of the items being thrown in the trash. Many of the DIs had taken it upon themselves to collect some of these items and pass it on to veteran organizations and thrift shops. Unfortunately the volume of reusable items was larger than the Drill Instructors could handle on their own.

This, of course, leads us to the second axiom- one person's trash is another person's treasure.

Not sure of the value of what they had or what they were going to do with the growing mound of reusable and recyclable material, the solid waste management team began to collect and sort the almost overwhelming numbers of useable items.

Treasure was indeed what they had.

Beyond satisfying the replacement needs of the recruits on station, Suzanne and her team found that local benevolent organizations were clamoring for many of the articles. They also found buyers for all of the items, so they could easily sell whatever was not passed on for reuse.

Finding the treasure was the easy part. The task of establishing a collection and processing system took time and resources.

Task one was to keep the reusable items out of the dumpsters from the start. There were two major problems. Additional bins were required to collect the items for reuse, and the recruits needed to learn to place their reusable items in the new recycle bins instead of the trash. New bins were purchased, and in keeping with the crisp Marine Corps image, painted red and gold, each marked for a sort category and placed near the barracks

of the recruit graduating class on the day before graduation. That solved the first problem.

The second problem took a bit more ingenuity. Unable to keep the recruits from mistakenly putting recyclable materials in the dumpsters, the simple solution was to have the Drill Instructors assume greater responsibility for the program. The DI used the respect and admiration they had earned from the recruits to stress that reusable items the recruits didn't want to transport to their next duty station could serve a better purpose if placed in the recycling bins rather than the trash can. With the message coming from this venue, the response was overwhelming.

The reuse and recycle end of the process needed business oriented solutions.

First, the team partnered with other Marine Corps and Navy recycle centers in the area to get used material handling equipment. The need for immediate storage containers was solved by the Recycling Team who improvised some very functional sort bins out of pallets and chicken wire. They were also able to make use of recruit working teams to process the goods through to dispersal.

Storage for unprocessed as well as processed goods to keep them out of the elements was a huge problem. The brain power took charge of this one, too. First, the team optimized their warehouse and storage space for this very important project. They also contracted with a local rescue mission to send unlaundered towels and clothing directly to the mission.

Another initiative was to send unlaundered towels to military gymnasiums for laundering and reuse. This initiative alleviated the need to purchase towels for 18 gymnasiums on 3 local military installations, saving the government tens of thousands of dollars annually. It goes without saying that the cost for MCRD to send their trash to the landfill reduced significantly.

The income from recycling increase substantially. In 1999 MCRD recycled approximately 650 tons of goods and materials, resulting in an astonishing 665 percent increase in total recycling revenue, from about \$4,300 in 1998 to \$28,600 in 1999. The goodwill earned by MCRD with the local benevolent organizations skyrocketed. All of this was because, as Suzanne Smith found out, one person's trash truly is another's treasure, and you can never be sure what is being thrown away unless you go look for yourself.

To date, the MCRD recycling program and its staffs' efforts have been recognized as a leader in Non-Industrial Recycling for the Department of Defense Environmental Security, Department of the Navy and the City of San Diego. Suzanne Smith will also be recognized with an Education and Outreach award at the White House Closing the Circle Awards this June.

# Park Service's Uniform Program Goes Green

**N**ational Park Service (NPS) employees donning their trademark green and gray uniforms are more environmentally friendly these days. The NPS is the first government agency to incorporate environmental standards while soliciting a new uniform supply contract.

The Park Service, together with U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, has a multi-agency uniform contract that comprises the largest civilian uniform contract in the U.S. Government. Between 16,000 and 17,000 NPS employees wear the green and gray uniforms. Combined with the other two agencies, approximately 25,000 uniformed government employees will be affected by the new standards.

The NPS mission dictates that agency employees must make every effort to demonstrate commitment to environmental compliance, education and stewardship. "The NPS should be the leader in these areas," said NPS Director Robert Stanton, "and it is my goal to involve every employee and partner in a concerted effort to become the leader among all Federal agencies in protecting the environment."

Inspired by this new focus on environmental leadership and new personnel perspectives, the NPS is making changes to its uniform program solicitation. The new program includes provisions to, "Ensure that environmentally preferable and energy efficient products, processes, and services are utilized in the design, manufacturing, packaging, and distribution of uniform components."

As the lead agency in the uniform contract solicitation, the NPS is requiring contractors and subcontractors to have recycling and energy conservation programs. The contractors must demonstrate improvement in these areas each year. The contractors are also required to report on known and potential pollution streams and harmful environmental practices, then correct these problems.

Incentives will be offered for environmentally improved products and processes such as: recycled-content fabrics; products that reduce the use of dry-cleaning chemicals; and the use of recycled-content and biodegradable packaging. Joint efforts between the uniform contractor and the NPS will provide interpretive materials with all garments.

Employees will be encouraged to describe the "green" attributes of the products when dressed in these items and making public contacts.

The new contractor will make the uniform catalog available on the Internet. This will eliminate literally tons of paper and ink by reducing the number of color uniform catalogs from approximately 40,000 every 2 years to 3,000 every 2 years. Forms and reports will be submitted online, making it possible to track orders electronically and avoiding the time it formerly took to move paper via mail.

To provide for continuous environmental improvement, Interior requires the contractor to go the extra bit and research environmentally preferable products. The contract provisions will be evaluated quarterly and bonuses or penalties will be awarded annually. Contractors will be evaluated on their ability to identify improvements in the environment, in addition to the improvement of products and systems. The contractors must also identify and train an "Environmental Performance Coordinator".

A partnership between the NPS, Department of the Interior, Environmental Protection Agency, a non-profit institute, and the contractor will jointly explore ways to improve the environmental quality of production, products, and distribution. This partnership will ensure a continuing dialogue between all parties that will aid in mutual understanding and provide an avenue for progress.

The existing uniform contractor, R & R Uniforms, Inc., a division of Horace Small Apparel Company, has already made strides toward a more environmentally sound uniform program. A 100 percent recycled content fleece jacket has been offered as a uniform component and a 65 percent recycled content cotton twill fabric for jackets and trousers is being researched.

The NPS objective for the new uniform contract is to exceed compliance with environmental laws and regulations.

Achieving environmental leadership is the start of preserving and maintaining precious resources for future generations – the most important part of the NPS mission.



# Creating a Successful EPP Cleaning Products Program

Thanks to the information generated by numerous successful EPP cleaning projects, purchasing cleaning products has become one of the easiest and best documented ways to incorporate multiple environmental concerns into purchasing decisions. This article outlines one possible approach, highlights some of the lessons learned by others, and recommends a few key resources.

## Follow the Pioneers

There are numerous successful EPP cleaning projects throughout the public and private sectors. Each of these programs has invested significant time and energy into developing a process for identifying and purchasing cleaning products they consider to be environmentally preferable. The City of Santa Monica, California, for example, developed detailed environmental specifications and reviewed 200 cleaning products in 17 product categories. The State of Minnesota followed a similar process and reviewed approximately 400 products in 33 categories.

As a result of these and other pioneering efforts, one of the first steps to take in beginning or expanding an EPP cleaning products program is to examine the trailblazing work of others. The resources listed below include some of the most well-known and well-documented EPP cleaning product initiatives and resources.

## Identify Environmental Priorities

Because different communities have different environmental concerns, it is important to identify local environmental priorities. Communities located in major metropolitan areas where smog and air quality are of concern might be more concerned about volatile organic compounds (VOC) content, which contributes to smog formation and can cause respiratory distress, than communities located in more rural areas. Similarly, rural communities lacking public water treatment facilities might be more interested in protecting water quality than in reducing VOC content. Santa Monica, for example, is an ocean community located near Los Angeles. As a result, its top priorities are biodegradability, aquatic toxicity, and air quality issues such as VOC content. The Commonwealth of Massachusetts was particularly interested in eliminating the use of chemicals identified in the Massachusetts Toxic Use Reduction Act.

EPA's EPP program encourages users to include as many relevant environmental attributes as feasible when examining cleaning products. If tradeoffs between attributes are necessary, select those attributes of most concern to the local community. The EPP Guidance encourages purchasers to take both global as well as local considerations into

account in determining environmental priorities. In the case of cleaning products, however, key environmental burdens are associated primarily with local conditions. The resources listed below include access to the information sources others have used to identify the relevant environmental attributes.

## Develop a Means of Comparing Products

EPP cleaning product pioneers rely on three types of systems to evaluate products—a pass/fail system, a score-card system, and a combined system. In a pass/fail system, a set of thresholds is developed for environmental attributes such as biodegradability, toxicity, and VOC content. Products that fall within the limits for all of the attributes are evaluated further. Products that fail to meet all of the criteria are eliminated from consideration. The U.S. General Services Administration used a pass/fail system with acute toxicity and biodegradability standards as part of an EPP pilot in its February 1996 Commercial Cleaning Supplies Catalog. Environmental standards organizations such as Green Seal, Germany's Blue Angel, and Canada's Environmental Choice programs use a pass/fail system to select products to for certification.

In a score-card system, a list of environmental attributes is developed, but instead of developing thresholds for each attribute, a point scale is used to reward or penalize a product for the presence or absence of each attribute. Minnesota used a very successful score-card system evaluating multiple attributes in which each attribute was worth points, for a maximum score of 90. Minnesota gave higher scores to products that minimized toxic content, did not cause human health concerns, avoided phosphates and ozone depleting substances, were available in recycled content packaging, did not contain synthetic dyes and fragrances, and used plant-based ingredients, among other environmental features. Products scoring at least 60 points were considered further for potential purchase.

Score-card systems can be modified easily to award or subtract points to reflect the environmental concerns of the community. Santa Monica, for example, rates corrosiveness on a scale of 0 to 2, while biodegradability is scored on a scale of 0 to 3. This reflects the city's greater concern for biodegradability. Other programs use the same point scale range to evaluate both of these attributes.

While both the pass/fail and score-card systems have obvious advantages, each also has disadvantages when trying to compare the environmental preferability of competing products. In a pass/fail system, for example, it is difficult to determine which of the products that passed are more

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## ***CLEANING PRODUCTS from previous page***

environmentally preferable than the others if the only information available is a certification that the product passed. Similarly, with the score-card system two products with the same score could have very different environmental profiles. One could have earned a lot of points for being biodegradable and another could have earned zero points for biodegradability. So if one particular attribute, such as biodegradability, is important, comparing only the final scores is an inadequate basis for comparison.

When comparing the advantages and disadvantages of these systems, most of the pioneers adopted a combined system. Using both pass/fail and score-card elements helps ensure that the environmental attributes an agency deems most crucial are mandatory and provides a basis for measuring the significance of other important environmental attributes. Massachusetts, for example, included five mandatory criteria and 19 desirable attributes in its product evaluation. Vermont, Santa Monica, and the Department of the Interior used similar systems.

## Collect Vendor Information

Once the list of desired environmental attributes and a method for comparing products have been developed, vendors can be asked to provide the necessary information. This request typically occurs as part of the solicitation process. Most of the cleaning product pioneers ask vendors to complete a product survey and to verify the information they submit as part of their request for proposal submittal. Pioneers ask companies to provide a variety of documentation on their products' environmental performance, including copies of their sales literature, material safety data sheets, product labeling and formulation information, certified statements signed by company officials, and third party certification information. Massachusetts and Santa Monica also require independent laboratory tests for certain environmental attributes.

## Evaluate Product Performance

All of the cleaning product pioneers field tested several products that claim to meet their environmental standards to ensure they performed as effectively as traditional products. Cleaning effectiveness is evaluated in a manner similar to that used to compare environmental attributes. As several

pioneers noted, this provides a wonderful opportunity to involve the custodial staff in the product purchasing decisions and to inform staff members of the new environmental features of the cleaning products they will use.

To help with this evaluation, many product vendors provide training to ensure their products are being used properly. It is important to take advantage of these opportunities because different cleaning techniques can radically affect the effectiveness of the product. Santa Monica discovered, for example, that changing the type of cleaning rag being used with a certain product could dramatically improve its performance.

Not all green cleaning products are as effective in every application. The National Park Service (NPS) discovered that different green products are needed for different applications. One floor cleaning product, for example, did not work well in one setting because, unlike the other floors used in the product evaluations, it is an unsealed concrete floor. NPS uses another product to clean this floor. Similarly, Santa Monica was unable to locate a floor stripper that met both its environmental and performance requirements. As a result, it continues to use the traditional floor stripper when necessary.

## Do Not Sacrifice Price or Performance

One should not have to sacrifice price or performance when purchasing a product with superior environmental features. After switching to cleaning products it deemed environmentally preferable, the City of Santa Monica, for example, documented a 5 percent price savings when compared to the traditional products it previously purchased. Massachusetts, Minnesota, and Vermont report that the green cleaners are "very cost competitive" with the prices of traditional products and that any additional costs are offset by other factors, including increased worker safety, superior performance, higher worker morale and productivity, and improved indoor air quality.

## For Additional Information

For additional information or assistance in developing an EPP process for cleaning products, please consult the resources listed at:

[www.epa.gov/oppt/epp/cleaners/resource.htm](http://www.epa.gov/oppt/epp/cleaners/resource.htm)

# Greening Uncle Sam (GUS) Purchasing Tool Suite

**E**PA's Environmentally Preferable Purchasing (EPP) Program has developed a number of web-based tools to assist federal purchasers in putting EPP into practice. And, there will be even more dynamic tools available later this year! See the following brief descriptions of each of the tools, collectively known as Greening Uncle Sam or "GUS," and then try them out yourself on the EPP website at [www.epa.gov/oppt/epp](http://www.epa.gov/oppt/epp). Select "How to Do EPP," then "Tools."

**Database of Environmental Information for Products & Services** -- a searchable database of product-specific information (e.g., environmental standards and guidelines or contract language) developed by domestic and international government programs, as well as third parties.

**Promising Practices Guide for "Greening" Contracts** -- a series of short case studies highlighting successful strategies for incorporating environmental factors into a variety of products and service contracts.

**Cleaning Product Attributes Ranking Tool** -- an interactive tool which helps the user chose a greener cleaning product by prioritizing environmental attributes (e.g., skin irritation potential, VOCs, recycled packaging).

**Tips on "Greening" Conferences** -- a one-stop shop for Green Conference information including a checklist of opportunities to minimize the

environmental impacts of holding meetings and conferences; contract language for obtaining "greener" conference planning/support services; and links to information on other related initiatives.

## Tips for Buying "Green" with the Government

**Credit Card.** -- tips to help government purchase card holders make "greener" choices when buying products, such as office supplies.

**General EPP Training Tool** -- covers basic EPP principles, along with some more in-depth applications of EPP, in an entertaining multimedia format. (Available in Summer 2000)

**Pioneer Tool for "Greening" Your Conferences** -- an interactive, multi-media tool to assist both conference planners and service providers (e.g., hotels, printers, caterers) in choosing and applying the opportunities for greening conferences and meetings. (Available in Fall 2000)

**Pioneer Tool for "Greening" Your Purchases** -- will help green purchasing pioneers answer some of the toughest EPP questions such as:

Should I try to buy one simple product or institute a larger green procurement program? Do I need to identify the appropriate environmental attributes or can I utilize existing information from the

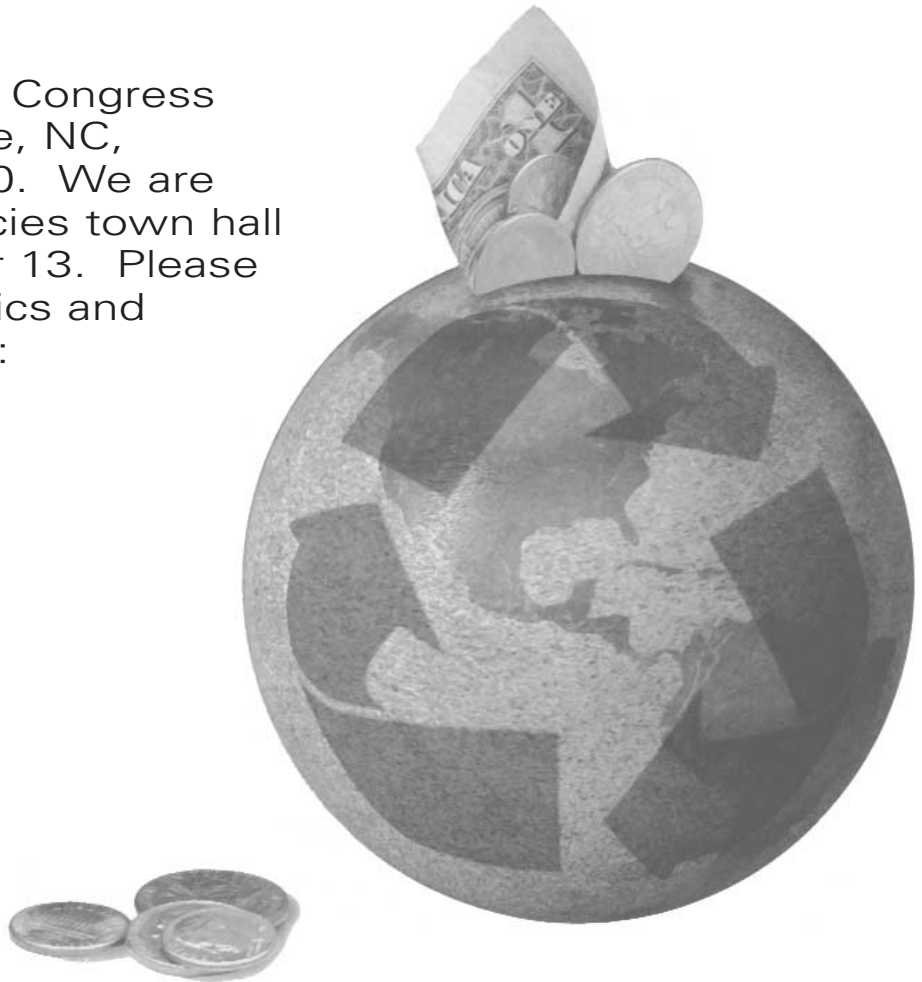
experience of others? What if I make the purchase with a credit card or through a contract? (Available in Winter 2000)



# Reminder!

The National Recycling Congress will be held in Charlotte, NC, September 10-13, 2000. We are hosting a federal agencies town hall meeting on September 13. Please post your ideas for topics and issues on our web site:

[www.ofee.gov](http://www.ofee.gov).



## White House Task Force on Recycling

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