

Columbus County

PURCHASING GUIDE for ENVIRONMENTAL PREFERABLE PRODUCTS



**Provided by
Columbus County Purchasing Department**

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Introduction

The Purchasing Department is responsible for ensuring that all Columbus County purchases are made in compliance with current federal, state, and local laws and County policies. The Purchasing Department is charged with the oversight, administration, and monitoring of the Procurement Policy and Procedures Manual.

Disclaimer: Users of this guide are responsible for complying with all applicable law (including without limitation North Carolina General Statutes 143-129 and 143-131), the Procurement Policy and Procedure Manual, and/or County Manager directives. Any specifications presented in this guide are not intended to constitute or render engineering, architectural, legal or other professional services or advice. Nor should they be a substitute for such services or advice from an experienced professional directed to a specific design situation. While information in any specifications is believed to be accurate, the Purchasing Department, shall not be liable for damages arising from errors or omissions in specifications.

Purpose

This guide introduces and defines “environmentally preferable purchasing” and is intended to support the effort of Columbus County for Environmental Stewardship by providing County Departments with valuable information and resources as they work to include environmental considerations when making purchasing decisions that are better for their employees and our environment.

Included in this guide are the basics of environmentally preferable purchasing, suggested purchasing resources and purchasing recommendations for many product groups to help you make environmentally preferable buying decisions.

How will this purchasing reference guide help me?

It is not always easy finding or deciding which product is better for our employees and environment. Every item we buy has an impact on our health and environment, no matter whether we are buying cleaning products, furniture, lights, motor oil, office supplies, paint, cars, and the list goes on.

We hope you find this reference guide a helpful resource when looking for products with environmental attributes or deciding between products. Most of all, it should encourage buyers to ask the right questions.

What is environmentally preferable purchasing?

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.

Questions to ask before purchasing a product include:

- Is the product less hazardous?
- Is it reusable or more durable?
- Is it made from recycled materials?
- What happens to the product at the end of its life? Can it be recycled? Will the manufacturer take the product back? Will it need special disposal?
- Does it conserve energy or water?
- Is it made from plant-based raw materials?

Depending upon which product you are buying, all or only a few of these questions will apply. One challenge in buying wisely is knowing which questions to ask. With this Guide helping to put environmental issues in context, asking these questions will become second nature.

What are environmental attributes?

Environmental attributes are those features of a product that make it preferable to purchase over other products. Some of the environmental attributes to consider are as follows:

Recycled Content	Buying products made with recycled materials save energy and resources, and keeps waste out of landfills. Recycled content products can be made with pre-consumer content, post-consumer content, or a mixture of both. Pre-consumer content utilizes materials from manufacturer's scrap. Post-consumer content utilizes materials collected from recycling programs.
Less Hazardous	Avoiding products containing hazardous chemicals reduces potential serious health risks to people and damage to the environment. As a general rule, always try to use the least amount of a hazardous product. Avoid products with the following precautionary words such Caution, Danger, Warning or Poison. Many alternative products are available that are less hazardous.
Conserves Energy	Reducing energy use is one of the simplest things we can do to curb impacts to the air we breathe and our environment. Energy production can contribute to emissions of carbon dioxide. Hydroelectric dams can degrade habitat and impede fish passage. By buying energy-efficient products, you will keep utility costs down and protect the environment. The federal Energy Star label helps buyers identify energy-efficient products.
Prevents Waste	Preventing waste can conserve natural resources. Our state generates millions of tons of municipal solid waste annually. You can prevent waste when you reduce the amount of material you buy to accomplish any task, buy repairable items, and find multiple uses for items.
Air Quality Low Volatile Organic Compounds (VOC)	Selecting products with low or no VOCs reduces indoor air quality hazards for employees. VOCs are chemicals that evaporate easily (volatilize) at room temperature and often have unhealthy and unpleasant vapors. They come from many products such as adhesives, carpeting, upholstery, paints, solvents, pesticides and cleaning products. Some VOCs may cause cancer, especially, when they are concentrated indoors. When VOCs hit sunlight it creates ozone, an air pollutant harmful to both people and plants.
Conserves Water	Choosing products and services that conserve water can save money on water and sewer bills. Less than one percent of the Earth's water is available for human consumption. Dry spells and pollution remind us that our water supply can be threatened.
End of Life Management	Considering the product's end of life issues when you buy can prevent costly disposal bills. Sometimes saving money up-front on a purchase results in spending more in the long term for proper disposal or injuries related to use of a product or disposal. It also encourages manufacturers to reduce their product's environmental burden.
Reduced Packaging	Packaging is a large component of municipal solid waste landfills. A product's packaging can account for a significant portion of the product's contribution to municipal solid waste. EPA's recommended approach to managing solid waste is to first reduce packaging of products, and second, recycle packaging materials.
Biodegradable	A "biodegradable" product has the ability to break down, safely and relatively quickly, by biological means, into the raw materials of nature and disappear into the environment. These products can be solids biodegrading into the soil or liquids biodegrading into water. Biodegradable plastic is intended to break up when exposed to microorganisms (a natural ingredient such as cornstarch or vegetable oil is added to achieve this result).

Why is environmentally preferable purchasing important?

The purchase and use of environmentally preferable products can have a profound impact – and not just on the environment. From worker safety to budget savings, wise purchasing has a number of additional tangible benefits:

- Buying less-hazardous products can reduce regulatory liability, improve worker safety, and lower disposal costs.
- Using energy-efficient and water-conserving products can save money.
- Products that are reusable, refillable, more durable, or repairable create less waste and are more cost-effective in the long run than disposable or single-use products.
- Buying recycled products conserves valuable landfill space by using goods made from materials that otherwise would have been discarded. Using recycled products and packaging also conserves natural resources and energy.

Practice the Four R's – Reduce, Reuse, Recycle, and Rebuy

Reduce: is the best of the four R's—because preventing waste in the first place means you have less waste to worry about in the end!

- Shop for products that have the least amount of packaging
- Buy in bulk quantities whenever possible.
- Rent or borrow items that are used infrequently.
- Maintain and repair items to ensure a long product life.

Reuse is the next best—if you can reuse your waste, it is longer considered waste! Giving away old clothes and other unwanted items to charities and thrift stores keeps good items out of the trash and can save you money. Why pay extra to dump good usable items when you can donate them for free?

Recycle: Sometimes things can't be reused. Recycling keeps raw material in the system and keeps us less dependent on virgin ore, oil and trees for raw materials. If we can keep recycling our products, not only will we reduce the amount of material going to the landfill, we will also reduce the necessity of mining and chopping down trees!

Rebuy: Close the loop! What good is recycling if nobody buys the recycled products? Buying recycled products creates a larger demand for them. More demand means more manufacturers will try selling more recycled products. You also might want to consider only buying products that can be recycled.



Third Party Certification and Acceptable Standards & Guidelines

There are a number of organizations that are putting considerable time and effort into evaluating products and services based on environmental impacts. Below are a few of the most widely recognized organizations that have established environmentally preferable product standards.

	<p>Green Seal is a nationally recognized nonprofit organization that certifies a variety of environmental products that pass stringent testing standards. Approved products carry a Green Seal logo that is well recognized throughout industry and government as a leading environmental standard.</p> <p>Green Seal bases its work on thorough, state-of-the-art scientific evaluations using internationally accepted methodologies. Product evaluations are conducted using a life-cycle approach to ensure that all significant environmental impacts of a product are considered, from raw materials extraction through manufacturing to use and disposal.</p> <p>www.greenseal.org</p>
	<p>Sponsored by the U.S. Department of Energy and the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, ENERGY STAR labels products such as computer CPUs, monitors, printers, copiers, and other devices that exceed US energy efficiency standards. ENERGY STAR also includes lighting, appliances, windows and many other products. www.energystar.gov</p>
	<p>United States Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) works to develop and enforce regulations that implement environmental laws enacted by Congress. EPA is responsible for researching and setting national standards for a variety of environmental programs, and delegates to states and tribes the responsibility for issuing permits and for monitoring and enforcing compliance. Where national standards are not met, EPA can issue sanctions and take other steps to assist the states and tribes in reaching the desired levels of environmental quality.</p> <p>The EPA provides Comprehensive Procurement Guidelines (CPG) that is updated every two years. Through the CPG, EPA designates items that must contain recycled materials when purchased with appropriated federal funds by federal, state, and local agencies. www.epa.gov/cpg</p>
	<p>American Society for Testing and Materials (ASTM) is one of the largest voluntary standards development organizations in the world and a trusted source for technical standards for materials, products, systems, and services. Known for their high technical quality and market relevancy, ASTM International standards have an important role in the information infrastructure that guides design, manufacturing and trade in the global economy. Standards for over 12, 000 items can be downloaded at: www.astm.org</p>
	<p>Greenguard Environmental Institute (GEI) is an industry-independent, non-profit organization that oversees the GREENGUARD Certification Program. As an ANSI Authorized Standards Developer, GEI establishes acceptable indoor air standards for indoor products, environments, and buildings.</p> <p>http://www.greenguard.org/</p>

Writing Specifications

When putting together your bid requirements for products and services consider how environmental attributes can be included in your specifications. Taking some time to consider environmental impacts before purchasing can result in lasting benefit for people and the environment.

Here are a few strategies:

- Require all products have a low impact to human health and environment.
- Require recycled content in products and products that can be easily recycled.
- Require packaging or containers that are refillable, returnable, or recyclable.
- Specify those environmental attributes that make sense to a product, such as non-toxic, recycled content, mercury-free, biodegradable, energy efficient, low VOC, Energy Star, or vendor recycling and take-back programs.
- Ask vendors to identify environmental attributes that are common to a product and then think about using them when preparing your specifications.
- Avoid specifications that would limit the purchase of certain products, e.g. requiring new equipment or virgin materials when refurbished or recycled products would work.
- Watch for over-specification; only specify product qualities that are critical to performance and leave other features open to alternatives, by specifying color of plastic items you may eliminate recycled-content items.
- Take into account the life-cycle costs, not just the purchase price of a product; consider long-term savings on maintenance, replacement and disposal costs.
- Give an evaluation preference to products that offer the environmental attribute that you are looking for, e.g. additional points based an environmental attribute.
- Award contracts using a good, better and best ranking for products and let the customer choose, this method allows for pricing differences for environmentally preferable products.
- Buy in bulk when feasible. Facilities can often realize significant cost-savings by buying certain items in bulk.
- Packaging should be recycled or recyclable materials and kept to a minimum to avoid waste.
- Keep track of what works well and any difficulties you encountered in purchasing these products for future purchases.
- Set environmental purchasing goals and track them for your office, department and agency.