

Eco-purchasing

Your building can support the environment and improve efficiency by adopting a purchasing practice known as *eco-purchasing*. Eco-purchasing means choosing products and services that reduce waste, support recycling, and minimize harmful impacts to the Earth's resources. One obvious example is choosing to purchase paper with recycled content for office needs and hotel printing. Demand for recycled paper spurs manufacturers to use recycled content and creates a market for recycled paper waste, thereby closing the loop on paper recycling efforts. But there are many less obvious products and services your facility can choose as well.

The central premise of eco-purchasing is the recognition that all products have an economic *and* environmental cost. Though we don't often consider the entire life cycle of a product in our purchasing decisions, there is an economic and environmental cost of materials, manufacturing, labor, transportation, packaging, merchandising, storage, and disposal. By considering the environmental impacts of what we purchase, we can make more informed choices and better protect the environment.

Getting Started

Eco-purchasing is implemented most effectively when a senior manager is given specific responsibility for it. The most appropriate person at your facility will depend on its corporate structure, but may include: the overall purchasing director, head of accounting, or chair of the environment committee. Larger companies may assign eco-purchasing as a primary job function.

A committee or team could also be appointed to oversee eco-purchasing, conduct background research about new products, suggest alternative products, and ensure that eco-purchasing decisions are made by all departments. Many hotels, office buildings, and other facilities belong to large chains or ownership groups, and, at least a portion of their purchasing decisions are made at a higher corporate level. Individual facilities will receive credit for eco-purchasing through the Audubon Green Program if it can be demonstrated that the corporate purchasing office has adopted eco-purchasing strategies and practices.

Developing a List of Preferred Products

Many manufacturers are already producing and packaging environmentally-preferable products to satisfy a growing "green" business demand. Once an "eco-purchasing coordinator" has been appointed, that individual (or team) should develop a list of preferred products and services, as well as a list of products to avoid. Ideally, such a list will include products that have had their environmental claims certified by an independent third party (*i.e.*, eco-labeled). The list should also be reviewed on a regular basis and revised if necessary. Take into account the following environmental considerations in your eco-purchasing decisions.

Products and supplies for eco-purchasing

- Appliances and computers
- Bathroom toilets and sinks
- Carpeting
- Cleaning products
- Electricity
- Fluorescent lamps and lighting
- Food and food/beverage products
- Furniture and furnishings
- Guest supplies: shampoo, soap, etc.
- Heating fuel
- Landscaping products
- Linens
- Office supplies
- Paints and other finishes
- Paper
- Printing services
- Sanitary paper
- Wood for renovation
- Vehicles

Production/Manufacturing: Raw material inputs for all of the products we use come from natural resources and require energy and water in manufacturing. Products made from recycled materials, such as recycled glass, paper, and plastic, reduce natural resource inputs, often require less energy, and open up markets for waste materials. When possible, choose products made from recycled materials. Also consider the toxicity of product purchases. Purchase products with less hazardous ingredients and that generate fewer toxic wastes in their manufacture.

Transportation: The farther a product has to travel to reach your building, the more pollution it generates. Purchasing locally or regionally produced products supports the local economy and reduces the economic and environmental costs of transportation.

Durability, Efficiency, and Use: Consider the durability and longevity of the products you purchase. Cheap products that don't last increase waste. The longer a product, such as furniture, electronics, and heavy duty equipment, stays in use, the fewer resources consumed. At the same time, consider the efficiency of older equipment when considering whether to upgrade. By purchasing newer, more efficient equipment, the building may quickly see a return on investment in terms of financial savings and environmental benefits.

Reuse and Recycling: Hotels, office buildings, and other facilities typically rely upon disposable, one-time-use products, such as soap, cups, and shampoo that quickly become trash. Look for ways to incorporate alternatives, such as shampoo or soap dispensers, reusable containers, and products that can be recycled. More than 200 billion bottles, cans, and plastic containers and cups are thrown away worldwide every year. Begin a recycling program for glass and plastic bottles that includes receptacles in office or guest rooms and common areas.



Support Environmentally Friendly Suppliers

On a final note, you can take eco-purchasing one step further by selecting products and services offered by environmentally-conscious producers, distributors, retailers, vendors, contractors, printers, graphic artists, and other businesses. Choose suppliers that use recycled products; recycle at their business sites; take back packaging; exercise energy and water conservation practices in their operations; and have implemented the use of less hazardous materials in the products they offer and use.

A word about food choices...

Eco-purchasing can extend to your restaurant menu, as well. Selecting locally grown fruit, vegetables, and meats supports local agriculture and ranching, which often helps to protect natural areas and scenic vistas free of charge.

In addition, avoiding fish and lobster whose stocks are near depletion or are unsustainably harvested is a good way to reduce the demand for overburdened ocean resources.



Disposal: Everything must go somewhere, and, in the case of the things we throw away, that somewhere is to landfills, incinerated into our atmosphere, or dumped in the ocean. Toxic wastes require special transportation, handling, and storage that pose threats to human health and the environment. Make choices that reduce the amount of hazardous waste generated and reduce waste volume overall. Reduce packaging, increase efficiency, and, when possible, divert useful products from the waste stream through reuse, recycling, or donation.