

TOP 10 SUSTAINABILITY SHOPPING LIST

Organizations starting out on their sustainable purchasing journey may find it overwhelming as there is so much to learn about how to reduce your negative and enhance your positive environmental and social impacts through your buying decisions.

To cut through the confusion, the Sustainability Purchasing Network (www.buysmartbc.com) developed the following list of 10 *simple* purchases to get you started. This list of “low hanging fruit” items doesn’t include some of the more complex purchasing decisions you can make, including sustainable or “green” buildings although this is a major area where your purchasing decisions can make a great sustainability impact. However, with these 10 easy steps you can start to make a difference right away. For help with larger purchases, contact the Sustainability Purchasing Network, details below.

1. Electronic Equipment

Electronic equipment and imaging devices carry considerable energy operating costs, and often embody hazardous chemicals. There are several tools to aid purchasers seeking the most energy efficient equipment. EnergyStar or EnerGuide labels show that the equipment has been designed to be energy efficient, which means less energy used, fewer greenhouse gas emissions, and reduced energy costs. The Electronic Product Environmental Assessment Tool (EPEAT) provides rating information for desktops, monitors, integrated systems and laptops based on environmental criteria including: reduction/elimination of environmentally sensitive materials, materials selection, design for end of life, product longevity/life cycle extension, energy conservation, end of life management, corporate performance and packaging. EPEAT is now working on environmental rating information for imaging devices (printers, multifunction machines), televisions, servers and mobile devices (cell phones, PDAs). Find EPEAT rated products at www.epeat.net.

2. Office Supplies

There is now a wide selection of environmentally responsible office supplies, including recycled paper clips, biodegradable pens, recycled content binders, and desk organizers (made of post consumer plastic). Discuss sustainability purchasing goals with office supply vendors to learn more about the sustainability features of office supplies they carry. There are also office supply companies that specialize in more sustainable products.

What is Sustainability Purchasing?

Sustainability purchasing is the acquisition of goods and services (“products”) in a way that gives preference to suppliers that generate positive social and environmental outcomes. It integrates sustainability considerations into product selection so that impacts on society and the environment are minimized throughout the full life cycle of the product. Sustainability purchasing entails looking at what products are made of, where they have come from, who has made them, how they will be ultimately disposed – even considering whether the purchase needs to be made at all. It encompasses environmental, social and ethical dimensions and brings benefit to the environment and local and global communities and workers.

For an overview of the financial, management, environmental and socio-economic benefits of sustainability purchasing, see www.buysmartbc.com/UserFiles/File/SPN-Benefits-At-A-Glance.pdf.

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3. Office Furniture

Office furniture can contain toxic materials that affect the health of the factory workers involved in the production and end users. For instance, workstations and tables manufactured with particleboard and fibreboard contain formaldehyde-based resins that negatively affect air quality. Particleboard and fibreboard made from recovered wood products, post-consumer wood products, and agricultural products, all bonded with formaldehyde-free resins, are on the market as options. Look for wood office furniture certified as sourced from well-managed forests. Forest Stewardship Council certified wood products provide assurance that wood is harvested in such a way that it maintains the essential characteristics of a natural forest before and after a timber harvest. Major retailers now carry lines of FSC certified wood products. For more information, visit www.fsccanada.org.

4. Paper

Paper is one of the most important products that purchasers buy, due to the volume of use and the potential impacts of its production. There are innumerable sustainability issues to be addressed – from recycled content, bleaching and carbon impacts, to sustainable forest management certification and the protection of endangered forests, not to mention reduction of paper use altogether.

According to the Environmental Paper Network (EPN), the main issues in procuring paper are ensuring woodlot operations are sustainably managed and that the fibre is not from endangered forests, maximizing recycled content, minimizing paper consumption, and eliminating chlorine bleaching. These issues are discussed on its website at www.environmentalpaper.org. There are also embedded greenhouse gases emissions in paper production, transportation, use and disposal that should be considered when purchasing and using paper. By choosing the right paper you can save wood, water, and energy and cut pollution and solid waste.

The first step in purchasing more sustainable paper is to prioritize the issues or impacts that are most important to your organization. The Forest Stewardship Council website has a step-by-step guide to paper procurement to help organizations create and implement a paper purchasing policy ([available at www.fsccanada.org/PaperProcurement.htm](http://www.fsccanada.org/PaperProcurement.htm)). The EPN provides paper procurement guidelines at www.environmentalpaper.org/documents/CommonVision-paper-guidelines.pdf. To compare the different paper choices visit papercalculator.org at www.environmentaldefense.org/papercalculator.

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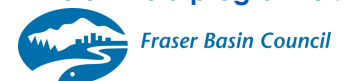
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5. Lighting

There are many lighting options available to organizations wishing to reduce their energy costs and their contribution to global warming. Compact fluorescent, High Intensity Discharge (HID) and Light Emitting Diode (LED) lighting is more energy-efficient compared to standard incandescent, fluorescent and halogen lighting. Energy efficient lighting also lasts much longer, requiring fewer replacements than standard lighting, thereby reducing materials, packaging and maintenance costs. Since all fluorescent and HID lights contain a small amount of mercury, it is important to choose the lowest mercury option available, and to recycle the bulbs at the end of their life. Some manufacturers offer very low mercury content lamps. LED lights are the best choice since they are the most energy efficient and contain no mercury. To date, they have been mostly restricted to specialized applications. However, LED technology is quickly advancing to produce the light quality required for many applications. BC Hydro's e-catalogue offers a list of approved lighting choices in BC at www.bchydro.com/ecatalog; check with commercial lighting dealers about energy efficient products in other areas of the country.

6. Cleaning Supplies and Custodial Services

By purchasing greener cleaners you can avoid the health and environmental impacts of many of the conventional products on the market. Conventional cleaners often contain harsh chemicals associated with cancer, reproductive disorders, respiratory ailments, eye or skin irritation, and other serious human health issues, and can also negatively affect indoor air quality. They can degrade water quality and cause harm to fish and other wildlife. Cleaning products are estimated to contribute approximately eight percent of total non-vehicular emissions of volatile organic compounds, which can cause eye, nose, and lung irritation, as well as rashes, headaches, nausea, asthma, and, in some cases, cancer (Green Seal, CNAD 2006). Both EcoLogo in Canada (www.environmentalchoice.com) and Green Seal in the US (www.greenseal.org) provide information on cleaning products that satisfy strict environmental criteria, with corresponding reduction in negative health impacts. Organizations which contract out their cleaning services should ensure their provider uses certified green cleaners.

In some communities, local organizations that hire people with employment barriers run cleaning services. In Vancouver, for example, The Cleaning Solution is a contract janitorial company run and staffed by individuals living with a mental illness and sponsored by the Canadian Mental Health Association. This is an opportunity for purchasers to integrate social dimensions into their sourcing decisions. When looking for cleaning contractors, buyers can investigate these local opportunities.

7. Meetings/Conferences/Events

Meetings are a frequent business activity with many impacts – from participant transportation and food sourcing to material use and waste. BlueGreen Meetings, a multi-stakeholder initiative spearheaded by Oceans Blue Foundation, provides tools and resources to organizations wishing to green their meetings and conferences at www.epa.gov/oppt/greenmeetings. Their top ten steps to greener meetings include: establish an environmental statement or policy for the meeting, use paperless technology, meet close, practice the 3Rs, provide bulk condiments, use green hotels, eat green and socially responsible, and save energy.

Several certification programs can help purchasers choose a greener facility for their meetings or conferences. The Green Leaf Eco-Rating Program for hotels certifies that a facility has embarked on an eco-efficiency program to conserve energy and water, and has made a commitment to environmentally sound practices. Green Leaf rated hotels in Canada can be found at www.terrachoice.com/Home/Certification/Hotel%20Eco-Rating.

Once you have reduced the carbon footprint of your meeting or event as much as possible,

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calculate the event's remaining carbon impact and offset the GHG emissions through tools such as www.offsetters.ca and www.zerofootprint.net.

8. Business Travel

Organizational travel – be it employee commuting, travel for regular meetings or air travel for conferences and business meetings – exacts a significant environmental toll, especially in greenhouse gas emissions associated with car and air travel. Many travel agencies and airlines participate in programs to offset the carbon impacts of air travel. Air Canada, for example, offers a carbon offset program at: www.aircanada.com/en/travelinfo/traveller/zfp.html. UNIGLOBE Travel has a Green Flight Program which is certified by Ecologo, details at: www.uniglobeadvancetravel.com/site/viewhome.asp?vty=article&sessionid=&aid=21779&sit=95&tid=0. However, the best practice is to minimize air travel. Consider video conferencing where applicable, and other modes of transportation such as bus and rail. Organizing rideshares and carpools can also reduce impacts.

SpaceShare works with organizations to customize environmental networking tools for events, where web applications let attendees find connections to share flights, rooms and rides. Visit www.spaceshare.com for more information.

Organizations with vehicle fleets should consider the environmental dimensions of their fleet vendor program. Resources on how to purchase fuel efficient, alternatively fueled and electric vehicles can be found at ICLEI – Local Governments for Sustainability (www.greenfleets.org) and the Fraser Basin Council (www.e3fleet.com).

For green accommodation, see item #7 for details regarding green hotels.

9. Gifts and Apparel

Apparel such as branded shirts and ball caps and other corporate gifts can have important environmental and social impacts. Since many gift and apparel manufacturers have been associated with unfair labour practices and human rights abuses, organizations should ensure that the products they buy are manufactured ethically, from factories that observe fair and safe workplace practices.

When procuring apparel, purchasers should be aware of the country of origin, as certain countries such as Burma have records of human rights violations, and confirm that the vendor has a Supplier Code of Conduct and compliance program as evidence of ethical practices. Purchasers can also request that their vendors disclose their environmental practices, programs and any fines they have received. The Fair Labour Association provides a list of gift and apparel companies committed to implementing socially responsible programs such as a Workplace Code of Conduct and monitoring to ensure that any violations are identified, addressed and corrected. See www.fairlabor.org/participants/companies.

Purchasers may also want to consider the material used in apparel production. The problem with traditional cotton – the most used clothing fabric in the world – is that producers use liberal amounts of insecticides, herbicides and synthetic fertilizers to grow it. According to the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, seven of the top 15 pesticides used on U.S. cotton crops are potential or known human carcinogens. Look for organic cotton, hemp, or other natural and environmentally responsible materials in corporate apparel products.

10. Coffee, Tea and Other Commodities

Organizations concerned about the social and environmental impacts of their coffee, tea and other commodity products such as flowers, bananas and cocoa, can look for a fair trade label which denotes that the product was sourced from fair trade certified organizations. A fair trade

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label provides assurance that farmers and workers in developing countries benefit from the following:

- Fair compensation for their products and labour;
- Sustainable environmental practices;
- Improved social services; and
- Investment in local economic infrastructure.

Fair trade coffee and tea are regularly available in most supermarkets and through niche and custom coffee service providers and caterers. For more information consult TransFair Canada at www.transfair.ca.

PURCHASING CHECKLIST

Here are some points to consider before you buy:

- Wherever possible consider buying used or leasing equipment.
- Buy recycled, used or salvaged materials when you can. The less "virgin" resources that go into products, the better.
- Avoid excess packaging – a large percentage of our solid waste stream is the result of unnecessary packaging. Work with suppliers to reduce or eliminate packaging, to use bio-compostable packaging, or to purchase larger, minimally packaged orders.
- Avoid polyvinyl chloride, or "PVC". Often labeled as "Number 3" plastic, and found in coloured window blinds, electrical cables, children's toys and other products, PVC is a leading source of dioxin (a potent toxin) in the environment. Greenpeace has more information on PVC and dioxin: www.greenpeaceusa.org/media/factsheets/poisonplastic.html
- Buy local wherever possible – this supports your local economy and reduces energy consumption, pollution and greenhouse gas effects caused by extensive transportation networks.
- Whenever you can, buy products certified as environmentally or socially responsible by a third party – the Global Ecolabelling Network website is useful for information about ecolabelling programs, issues and methodologies (www.gen.gr.jp). The EcoLogo is Canada's label for certified products and services. Find Ecologo certified products at www.ecologo.org/en/
- Consider if there are local organizations offering goods and services to the marketplace that also hire and train people with employment barriers, such as an inner-city business, or a non-profit enterprise. Contact the Enterprising Non-Profits program for a list of such businesses near your community: www.enterprisingnonprofits.ca
- Minority-owned businesses can also provide value-added services and products to a socially responsible organization. Consider sourcing your products from Aboriginal owned, disabled-owned or other minority-owned small businesses and thereby help to improve economic conditions for minority groups. Check out the 2010 Business Network for firms with these social attributes: www.2010commercecentre.gov.bc.ca.

Acknowledgements



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- Case studies on best practice in sustainability purchasing
- Guide to the business case for sustainability purchasing
- Tools for advancing sustainability purchasing policy and practice
- Training workshops
- Learning circles and online dialogues to network and share best practices
- Collaborative projects such as buyers clubs, product fairs and initiatives to support economic sustainability
- A newsletter with news, events, resources, tools and updates
- Technical assistance and advisory services

For more information, tools and resources, visit the Network's website at www.buysmartbc.com.