Green purchasing policy

Part three:

Green purchasing policies at the office

In an effort to enhance environmental performance, many companies have instituted purchasing policies that give preference to environmentally friendly products.

A company-wide purchasing policy encourages sustainable purchasing practices in the organisation and helps ensure that green efforts do not fade with employee turnover.

Purchasing policies should be comprehensive and cover a wide range of products and services. Policies can vary widely, and your business should implement a policy that works best for your organisation.

Purchasing policies can be as prescriptive (and as aspirational) as your company chooses. In some cases, your company will be able to purchase environmentally preferable products at little or no extra cost.

In cases where the price of environmentally superior products exceeds that of products currently used, the increased cost can sometimes be offset by more efficient operations. Recycled paper, for example, sometimes costs more than virgin paper. However, this cost can be offset by double-sided printing, reducing the number of printers in use, and reduced paper use.

An example of how to begin implementing your own workplace environmentally friendly purchasing policy is contained in the sample policy below:

The goal of this policy is to ensure that all products and services purchased will conform with the goals of our company's Environmental Policy. We will strive, where feasible, to purchase environmentally preferable products and services that meet the company's needs.

Where possible, purchasing decisions shall favour:

1. *Products that reduce greenhouse gas emissions or are made with renewable energy*
2. *Products that reduce the use of chemicals that are hazardous to the environment and employee and public health*
3. *Products that contain the highest possible percentage of postconsumer recycled content*
4. *Products that reduce air and water pollution*
5. *Products that reduce waste*
6. *Suppliers who strive to improve their environmental performance and provide environmentally preferable products, and who can document the supply-chain impacts of their efforts*
7. *Reusable products*
8. *Products that serve several functions (e.g., copier/printers, multipurpose cleaners) and reduce the overall number of products purchased*
9. *Products that are recyclable or compostable*

Environmentally preferable products and services comparable to their standard counterparts in quality and price should receive purchasing preference.

In situations where environmentally preferable products are unavailable or impractical, secondary considerations should include the environmental management practices of suppliers and producers.

Here is a sample letter to current suppliers:

Dear _____,

In an effort to improve the environmental performance of our company, we would like to meet to discuss the environmental attributes of the paper products that you supply to us. We would also like to discuss ways to cost-effectively switch to less harmful paper products within the next few years.

We are aware that the worldwide demand for paper products creates incentives for harvesting and manufacturing practices that are harmful to the environment and that can irreparably damage ecologically irreplaceable forests. We would like to reduce as much as possible the harmful environmental impacts associated with our paper consumption and we are particularly interested in improving the following attributes of the paper we buy:
• Post-consumer recycled content
• Chlorine-free bleaching processes
• Mercury-free pulping caustic

We look forward to discussing this with you. Please feel free to contact me with any questions.

Contract wording

Including environmental language in requests for proposals and contracts increases the likelihood that your company's procurement goals will be respected by suppliers.

Environmentally friendly contract language can incorporate a wide range of environmental objectives. For example, a contract with an advertiser could specify that all bids be submitted double-sided, and all advertisements be printed on recycled paper; a contract with a delivery service could state that it must use fuel-efficient vehicles and purchase carbon credits to offset total vehicle miles travelled; a contract with a food vendor could include provisions for prioritising local suppliers, composting food waste and taking back packaging for recycling. The possibilities are endless.

An example of how companies can incorporate general environmentally friendly language into contracts and request for proposals is contained below:

Our company has adopted an environmental policy to improve its environmental performance. To advance these goals, products and services contracted for will be evaluated in part based on their environmental attributes. Specific factors to be considered include:
• Greenhouse gas emissions
• Habitat impacts
• Regulatory compliance
• Recycled content
• Energy efficiency
• Water efficiency
• Toxic chemical reduction

Please address these concerns when submitting your proposals.

> **"Use energy-saving light bulbs. Compact fluorescent light bulbs (CFLs) save energy and money in the long run**

Purchasing tips

Following are some general principles for buying environmentally friendly office equipment which will ensure that your organisation can achieve full environmental and economic benefits.

ENERGY EFFICIENCY

• Ensure that all equipment conforms at least to ENERGY STAR requirements. Specifying the requirement of ENERGY STAR compliant and enabled office equipment in purchasing policies and procurement contracts ensures that your supplier delivers all products with the ENERGY STAR low-power feature enabled and tested.

• Check power ratings in operating, low power, sleep and off modes so that you can select the most energy-efficient, value-for-money model that meets all your operating requirements. Bear in mind that some equipment can still consume energy after the on/off button has been switched off and the power point is still switched on.

• Obtain data on the time the equipment takes to return to op-

eration when it is switched on or woken up so that you can select equipment that responds quickly. There is no definite correlation between energy use in sleep mode and speed of wake-up.

• Look for the lowest possible time options to move to low power, sleep and off modes. This will save you both energy and money.

PAPER, CONSUMABLES

Producing and transporting a sheet of paper to your office usually takes more energy than your printer, fax or photocopier uses to place images on it. The embodied energy of paper is therefore a significant issue, and becomes more so with energy-efficient equipment.

Manufacturing recycled paper can use up to 90 per cent less water and 50 per cent less energy than making it from trees. For office equipment that uses paper, specify:

• Capacity to operate effectively using recycled paper
• Capacity for double-sided printing
• Plain paper instead of thermal paper for fax machines (thermal paper has higher embodied energy and more chemicals in it than plain paper and may not be accepted in office paper recycling schemes)
• A capacity for photocopiers to scan paper printed on both sides
• Long-life printing drums and toner cartridges, which are generally cheaper overall, and less environmentally damaging than shorter-lived alternatives.
• A guarantee that the use of remanufactured or refilled toner or ink cartridges will not void warrantees or decrease reliability
• A list of approved remanufacturers or refillers of cartridges.

Bear in mind that the cost of buying imaging consumables can be much more than the cost of buying the paper-imaging equipment. For example, a very popular brand of colour inkjet printer with two bonus ink cartridges can be bought for $250, while replacement cartridges cost $50–60 each. Think of longevity, reusability and refillability of imaging components when buying equipment.

DESKTOP COMPUTERS AND MONITORS

When selecting computers and monitors be sure to:

• Consider buying a laptop, since a laptop is much more energy- and materials-efficient than a desktop computer and monitor
• Consider buying LCD-type flat screens for desktop computers, as they are more energy and space-efficient than standard monitors
• If you have a network, buy computers that have been tested with your network software.

PHOTOCOPIERS

• If you are looking for a copier with accessories, make sure that the quoted power rating in lower power mode includes the power consumed by accessories.

• Look for a copier with an "energy save" button in addition to programmable power management features so that users can put the machine into low power mode as soon as they finish copying.

• Choose a copier with a seven-day clock that allows you to program it to turn off when it isn't needed at the end of each work day and on weekends.

• Unless you are buying a small format photocopier, choose one with the capacity to reduce from A3 to A4.

• For multi-user copiers, consider a second paper bin to feed paper that is already printed on one side.

• Select a photocopier with a high recycled material content and that makes use of recycled components.

PRINTERS

Ensure the printer has toner- or ink-saving modes such as draft or "econosave" and ask to see documentation of the amount of toner and ink saved in this mode. Choose a printer that can print double-sided and consider installing a third paper bin for networked printers so that you can print drafts and internal documents on paper that is already printed on one side. For small-volume printers that don't have the ability to print double-sided, make sure odd and even pages can be printed easily.

Laser printers use similar technology to photocopiers, so their energy consumption is similar to that of small photocopiers. Inkjet or modern dot matrix printers can provide very high print quality but they are slower than laser printers.

Whilst inkjet printers are often cheaper than laser printers, the cost of buying new ink cartridges may make them more expensive in the long run.

FAX MACHINES

Buy a plain paper machine. If it's a laser or LED machine, make sure your warranty covers reusing paper. Otherwise, choose an inkjet machine. For fax/printer machines, make sure that the model you choose is more energy-efficient than running two separate machines would be. Ensure the fax machine has toner or ink-saving modes such as draft or "econosave" and ask for documentation of the amount of toner and ink saved in these modes.

SCANNERS

To meet ENERGY STAR requirements scanners must be able to enter a sleep mode of 12 watts or less in no more than 15 minutes.

There are some scanners on the market with a power rating for sleep mode of about 3 watts, but most are three to four times that amount.

Generally, high resolution scanners use more energy in sleep mode than lower quality ones. However, there are a few high resolution machines at the energy-efficient end of the scale. Consult the manufacturer regarding the 'sleep mode' energy rating.

Scanners are now one of the fastest growing segments of the office equipment market and are commonly included in home/small office computing packages. In most offices scanners are used occasionally and can therefore be switched off for most of the time.

MULTIFUNCTION DEVICES (MFDS)

Multifunction devices (MFDs) are machines which print and fax as well as copy. The advantages of MFDs include system integration, ease of use, office space savings and often significantly lower capital costs compared to buying several equipment items performing the same range of functions.

Choosing an MFD over individual equipment ensures significant savings in embodied energy, materials and environmental impacts.

> **"Companies can institute purchasing policies that give preference to environmentally friendly products**