

EPP: Environmentally Preferred Purchasing

The average hotel purchases more products in one week than 100 families will typically purchase in one year. One of the most powerful ways the lodging industry can be more “green” is to vote with their dollars through environmentally preferred purchasing (also known as green purchasing and responsible purchasing).

Environmentally preferred purchasing (EPP) is procurement of goods and services that have a lesser or reduced effect on human health and the environment compared to other goods and services that serve a similar purpose. These products are long lasting, high-quality, less toxic, reusable and easy to recycle. Environmentally preferable products use less materials, water and energy, minimizing the impact on our natural environment.

Some of the many benefits of an EPP program include saving money through energy efficient and water conserving products, reducing waste disposal costs, conserving natural resources, improving public health, minimizing hazardous wastes, and protecting the environment.

The best way to start an EPP program is to work with your purchasing, janitorial, housekeeping, engineering, and management staff to see which products are being used, and measure energy and water usage, waste disposal costs, etc. against these products. Then, brainstorm and research ideas on making your purchasing program more “green”, and start putting these ideas in writing. The next step is to include environmental attributes as specifications in your bid solicitations or proposal requests and work with vendors and staff to make these changes. The following sections outline some important components of an EPP program.

1. BUY ENERGY-EFFICIENT AND WATER-CONSERVING PRODUCTS

The easiest area the lodging industry can save the most money is through purchasing energy-efficient and water-conserving products. Reducing energy use is important because most energy production contributes to problems such as carbon dioxide emissions (tied to global warming), mercury releases, acid rain, volatile organic compounds, and nuclear waste. The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency and U.S. Department of Energy developed the ENERGY STAR label to help purchasers identify energy-efficient products. These products reduce utility bills and help the environment. With the help of ENERGY STAR, Americans have saved enough energy in 2005 alone to avoid greenhouse gas emissions equivalent to those from 23 million cars — all while saving \$12 billion on their utility bills.

If you own or operate a hotel, motel, bed and breakfast, or guesthouse, you face special challenges regarding energy management. Consider installing high efficiency [ENERGY STAR labeled products](#), or other products with similar efficiency results, when purchasing new equipment, including the following:

- Appliances – clothes washers, refrigerators, room AC, room air cleaners, etc.
- Heating & cooling – boilers, central AC, etc. (see the [Green Lodging HVAC guide](#).)

- Insulation, roofing, & windows
- Home electronics – cordless phones, televisions, etc.
- Office equipment – computers, copiers, monitors, fax machines, etc.
- Lighting – compact fluorescent light bulbs, exit signs, ceiling fans, etc. (see the [Green Lodging Lighting Guide](#))
- Commercial food service – commercial refrigerators, fryers, steam cookers, etc.

For more information about energy-efficient products, go to www.energystar.gov or www.eere.energy.gov.

In the hospitality industry, guest showers, pools, and laundry operations account for a large part of a hotel's energy bill. Toilets and urinals alone account for nearly one-third of building water consumption, making potential for water savings very high. Learn more about water-conserving products, like low-flow toilets, waterless urinals, automatic faucet controls, and low-flow showerheads, by going to the Green Lodging [Water Conservation Guide](#).

2. BUY RECYCLED PRODUCTS

Recycled products are made from recyclable materials that are collected from post-consumer or post-industrial waste sources. When making purchasing decisions for your organization, it is best to find out from the manufacturer how much recycled material and what type of recycled material is used in the product. Suppliers and stores that you already do business with probably have recycled products in stock. Often, just the process of asking spurs companies to look for recycled products to satisfy their customers' needs. Use directories such as the [Michigan Recycled Materials Market Directory](#) and the Internet to find lists of recycled products that are on the market.

Common recycled products for use in the lodging industry include:

[Paper Products](#) - Try to purchase at minimum 30% post consumer recycled content in office paper, envelopes, business forms, paper napkins, toilet paper, and paper towels.

[Toner Cartridges](#) - A widely accepted practice is the recycling of used toner cartridges and more importantly the purchase of re-manufactured toner cartridges. These products are widely available and offer the same performance at a reduced cost.

[Office Furniture](#) - When purchasing office furniture, first look at used pieces and those with recycled content. Such options can offer cost savings as well as environmental benefits. Look for classic designs that will last without looking dated. Finally, consider quality carefully. Although low-cost products may be tempting, they may also break more readily and offer fewer repair options than higher quality furniture.

[Carpet](#) - When purchasing new carpet, look for brands with recycled-content face fiber and/or backing. Typically, carpet with recycled-content facing is available with either recycled nylon or PET polyester fiber. PET polyester carpets are recommended for light- to

moderate-use areas, such as private offices. Carpet with recycled nylon face fibers and/or recycled-content backing has wider applications, including heavier-use areas like hallways and entrances. Ask for the highest level of post-consumer content and request documentation. Selections should contain a minimum of 25% post-consumer material by weight.

As technology advances, the products that we use everyday are improving. They are becoming better for the environment, cheaper, and work even better than the previous products. Buying recycled products help “close the loop” by supporting the recycled materials markets

3. BUY NON-TOXIC PRODUCTS

Buying non-toxic products will keep hazardous chemicals out of the soil, air, and water. It also reduces regulatory, environmental, and personal liabilities; improves worker safety; and can reduce disposal costs.

Read the Label!

Products containing hazardous chemicals can pose health risks to employees and the public, as well as threaten the environment. In addition, hazardous products often require special and costly waste disposal methods. If possible, buy products that do not contain the following signal words in their labeling.

- Caution: mild to moderate hazard
- Warning: moderate hazard
- Danger: corrosive, extremely flammable, or highly toxic
- Poison: highly toxic

If less hazardous alternatives are not readily available, use the least amount (according to package instructions) of a hazardous product needed to accomplish a task and utilize all remaining prod-

There are several opportunities for the lodging industry to buy non-toxic products. Here we will focus on two major areas – architectural paint and cleaning products.

ARCHITECTURAL PAINTS:

Architectural paint (paint used in and on buildings) is used everywhere and serves several important functional and aesthetic purposes. However, it has the potential to negatively affect both health and the environment. There are architectural paints available that do not pose health or ecosystem problems and still meet the price and performance standards required in a quality product. The following are some guidelines to help you select these environmentally preferable paints.

Calculate paint needs carefully – Measuring surfaces will help avoid ordering more paint than necessary. Be aware, however, that colors may not match precisely from one can to the

next, so all paint of a given color should be mixed together before starting the job. A handy paint quantity calculator is available on-line at www.kellymoore.com.

Choose water based (latex) paints - Latex paints now meet or exceed the performance of oil-based paints and are preferable because they use water as a carrier while alkyd paints generally use volatile solvents as carriers. Latex paints do not represent a fire hazard like oil-based paints, so storing them is less of an issue. Because they do not use solvents as the primary carrier, latex paints emit far fewer volatile organic compounds upon application. They also do not require solvents for the cleaning of tools and equipment.

Choose low or no volatile organic compounds (VOCs) - The presence of VOCs in paint can often be detected by their strong odor. Low odor paints will generally have lower VOCs, while a quick drying paint will generally be higher in VOCs.

Choose biodegradable paint strippers – Historically, paint strippers have been caustic by nature and high in VOC content. There are now a number of quality biodegradable paint strippers on the market that are just as effective at removing paint as their traditional counterparts. For example, [soy based paint strippers](#) contain no methylene chloride and are non-toxic. They have no odor, are safe for indoor use, and can be used on vertical and horizontal surfaces. They are effective with lead based paint and can be used for graffiti removal as well.

CLEANING PRODUCTS:

Cleaning products are necessary for maintaining attractive and healthful conditions in the home and workplace. In addition to the obvious aesthetic benefits of cleaning, the removal of dust, allergens, and infectious agents is crucial to maintaining a healthful indoor environment. But cleaning products can present several health and environmental concerns. They may contain chemicals associated with eye, skin, or respiratory irritation, or other human health issues. Additionally, the concentrated forms of some commercial cleaning products are classified as hazardous, creating potential handling, storage, and disposal issues for users. Reducing the human health and environmental concerns is an important incentive for implementing an EPP cleaning products program.

More EPP cleaning benefits include:

- Choosing less hazardous products can minimize harmful impacts to custodial workers, improve indoor air quality, and reduce water pollution.
- Buying less hazardous cleaners may reduce hazardous waste costs when it comes time to properly dispose of any leftover cleaners.
- Switching from traditional cleaning products to biodegradable, low-toxicity, or otherwise less harmful products can dramatically reduce the environmental impact of routine cleaning activities without sacrificing cleaning effectiveness.

(Adapted from Green Seal's *Choose Green* Report)

EPA's EPP Program has developed a [Web-based tool](#) to help purchasers consider the environment, along with price and performance, when buying a product or service. This

interactive tool helps the user choose a greener cleaning product by prioritizing environmental attributes (e.g., skin irritation potential, VOCs, recycled packaging).

For a detailed list of EPP approved cleaners, check out the [New American Dream Web](#) site.

4. BUY PRODUCTS THAT LAST LONGER AND USE LESS MATERIALS

Environmentally preferred purchasing looks at all areas of purchasing - not just the product being purchased but end of life issues as well. Products of high quality that last longer and use less materials are most preferred. For instance, in recent years packaging has become more and more convenient. Plastic wrap and bags, aluminum and steel foils, and many products come in boxes inside designer boxes. The lodging industry can start to reduce waste by looking at packaging from the standpoint of what do we really need to get the job done.

Most vendors are willing to brainstorm and help out. Partnering with vendors helps them serve your business better. The following checklist offers additional considerations:

- Look for a high quality, local supplier, with minimal packaging.
- Choose vendors that have demonstrated a commitment to the environment.
- Buy in bulk or in concentrated form whenever feasible (condiments, single serving containers, beverages, etc.)
- Consider if packaging is recyclable in your area/program? If not, talk to your vendor about changing to a different type of packaging.
- Request vendors to take back pallets and crates.
- Minimize non-recyclable packaging - chicken, fish, and vegetables are often packaged in waxed cardboard, ask your vendor to pack in reusable or recyclable containers or crates.
- Avoid fresh produce that is packaged or has stickers on it. Let vendors know that stickers are wasteful and time consuming to remove.

Case Study

One hotel manager tells the story of his beer purchases. He found that his hotel generated a great deal of beer bottles. The local recycling program did not offer collection for brown or green bottles but did take aluminum cans. So this manager met with his food and beverage staff and they worked together to install the capability to handle draft beer in the high volume bars. For the remaining areas and the room service bars, the manager talked to the beer supplier about switching to aluminum cans. The cans arrived in twelve pack boxes that were laid inside cardboard flats. The manager asked the vendor to deliver the beer loose in flats, the vendor could not comply but he could offer beer in plastic six pack rings, in cardboard flats. On a monthly basis, with this one product, the manager was able to reduce his waste by over 8000 pounds!

In another area of the hotel, housekeeping was shorthanded and the head housekeeper spent a week helping in Laundry and stocking the maid's carts. She realized that each week they went through several plastic barrels of detergent and buckets of other cleaning chemicals, which the maids used to clean the rooms. These buckets were being tripled rinsed and thrown away because the local recycling program only accepted plastic beverage bottles. So the head of housekeeping sat down with the vendor to discuss alternative packaging and to ensure that they were maximizing their use of concentrates. The vendor was able to arrange to have the empty containers returned to the factory to be refilled when new product was delivered to the hotel. In addition, the same vendor was able to introduce the hotel to a new more concentrated laundry detergent, which actually saved the hotel money on each wash load. Not only was the head housekeeper reducing plastic waste by over 150 pounds per week by utilizing refillable detergent containers, but also she was able to reduce costs for the laundry operation!

Consumers' Union

5. BUY FOOD FROM LOCAL MICHIGAN SOURCES

Buying your food locally is good for Michigan's economy, good for family farmers, good for your customers' health, and good for the environment. Not to mention how good fresh, local food tastes! The Michigan Department of Agriculture's [Select Michigan Program](#) provides a hard copy Directory of Farm Markets, U-Picks, Cider Mills, etc. and allows on-line searches by county or city for markets or product.

[Local Harvest Program](#) lists markets, co-ops and grocery stores with local foods, organic restaurants, etc.

6. RESOURCES FOR EPP

Consumers' Union - The folks of "Consumers' Reports" magazine have launched a new web site called "Greener Choices" with a dozen products across several categories, including electronics, appliances, home & garden, autos and food. There is also a "green ratings" section for many products. www.eco-labels.org/greenconsumers/home.cfm

Energy Star - A program sponsored by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency that sets energy-efficiency standards for computers, monitors, printers, and other appliances and certifies green buildings. www.energystar.gov/index.cfm?c=products.pr_index

EPA's EPP Website - This website has guides for purchasing carpet, copiers, food service-ware, cleaning products, electronics, and other links. www.epa.gov/epp

EPA's Recycled Content - EPA's CPG (comprehensive procurement guidelines) is focused on recycled content. The fact sheets include content descriptions and offers specs and additional resources. The Supplier Database allows you to search by subject and state and find suppliers of products. www.epa.gov/cpg/

Green Seal Product Ratings - An independent organization that certifies and promotes green products and services. www.greenseal.org

MDEQ Purchasing Guide - Although written for the golf course pollution prevention program, this document contains useful product information as well as a list of environmental products and Michigan sources. www.deq.state.mi.us/documents/deq-ess-p2-turf-purchasingguide.pdf

Minnesota's Purchasing Guide - Contains evaluated products for office, vehicles, building and landscaping purchases. www.swmcb.org/eppg/default.asp