Introduction to Green Purchasing

Without doing a full life cycle analysis on a product or service it is often difficult to establish what the true impacts of our purchasing decisions are and what significance one impact has over another. Natural resources, human and ecosystem health can all be impacted during a product’s life cycle.

The aim of this guide is to provide information about the environmental and health effects of the most commonly purchased products, how to make more informed decisions and where the most preferable products can be sourced.

How the Green Purchasing Guide is constructed

Each section of the guide is being compiled with input from a working party made up of stakeholders from the relevant areas on campus. It will be updated regularly to reflect new information and research.

Specific purchasing guidelines are being developed into five sections:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. <strong>Office supplies and electrical goods</strong></td>
<td>Covers the most common office supplies and electrical goods purchased at the University through Schools, Centres, Libraries and Stores. It includes paper, envelopes, stationery, printers, photocopiers, toner and ink cartridges, faxes and personal computers.</td>
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<td>2. <strong>Food outlets and Businesses</strong> (currently being drafted)</td>
<td>Covers the most common purchases in food outlets and businesses on campus.</td>
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<tr>
<td>3. <strong>Construction and maintenance</strong> (yet to be drafted)</td>
<td>Covers the most commonly purchased construction materials at the University of Queensland.</td>
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<td>4. <strong>Cleaning</strong> (yet to be drafted)</td>
<td>Covers cleaning products purchased by the University of Queensland.</td>
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<tr>
<td>5. <strong>Transport</strong> (yet to be drafted)</td>
<td>Covers the purchase of vehicles at the University of Queensland.</td>
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Each section of the guide will cover:
- Environmental and human health impacts
- Impact reduction actions
- Frequently asked questions
- Green purchasing checklist
- Resources

The checklist for each section can be used as a quick guide for identifying a product’s impact on the environment and on human health. Preferred products should have the least impacts.

The information in each section should be used along with other information outlined in the resources section. In particular the Australian Environmental Labelling Association has published a series of Voluntary Environmental Labelling Standards for most of the products mentioned throughout this guide which give a good indication of the expected environmental performance of the products that you will be purchasing.
Green Purchasing Objectives

The objectives of Green Purchasing for the University of Queensland are:

- To reduce the purchase of goods and equipment.
- To increase the use of recycled content products as a percentage of all products purchased.
- To encourage the purchase of energy star compliant equipment.
- To increase awareness of environmental issues associated with procurement through training.

Why Green Purchasing?

Green procurement initiatives have the potential to deliver significant market shifts towards sustainable consumption in Australia and significant shifts in demand and supply are starting to occur on the basis of environmental performance. The primary purpose of a green procurement program is to implement approaches to purchasing products or services of a high quality at the most reasonable cost while also lowering the impact on the environment and human health.

Environmental and social impacts can occur at any stage of a products life cycle from extraction of raw materials to the transportation, manufacture, use and disposal or reuse. It is the responsibility of the procurement officer to be aware of potential impacts that a products life cycle will have on the environment and acknowledge that the regenerative capacity of the environment is limited. Purchases must be based on least environmental impact while still considering such things as health and safety, value for money and fitness for purpose.

A large percentage of an institution’s expenditure is allocated to purchasing products and materials, therefore green procurement should be used as an instrument to move markets toward the delivery and consumption of environmentally responsible products and services. The University can play an important role in preserving resources for future generations by reducing resource consumption, pollution and waste requiring disposal. The commonwealth and most of the states in Australia are well on the way to having green procurement as an integral part of their purchasing policy and guidelines. (Australian Environmental Labelling Association (AELA) 2004)

National and State Context

Resource Efficiency is a principal element of waste management in Australia and is embodied in the waste hierarchy as outlined below. (National Packaging Covenant Council 2005)

Avoidance
Re-use
Recycling
Energy recovery
Disposal

The Commonwealth

The commonwealth has established a green procurement mandate within the existing purchasing guideline under the “fitness for purpose” criteria in Requests For Tender (RFT). In the Commonwealth Guidelines and Best Practice Guidance, a framework has been developed through existing clauses related to ‘Value for Money’.
The National Packaging Covenant

In addition, the National Packaging Covenant aims to reduce environmental degradation arising from the disposal of used packaging and conserve resources through better product design and production and the reuse and recycling of used packaging materials. It is a voluntary covenant signed by the Australian and New Zealand Environment and Conservation Council Ministers, Local Government and a broad range of industries in the packaging supply chain in 1999.

Covenant performance against this objective will be assessed by reference to four specific performance goals that encompass environmental, social and economic performance. More information and a comprehensive list of signatories is available at http://www.deh.gov.au/industry/waste/covenant/signatories.html

The States

Every state has established suitable references in standard procurement guidelines to incorporate the preference of environmentally sensitive products, or formally established green procurement programs. Many states have also commenced a process of Environmental Management System certification for departments which will incorporate requirements of green procurement. (AELA 2004) The ACT, NSW, NT, TAS & WA have issued specific environmental procurement guidelines under value for money or environmental protection criteria. Western Australia also has a specific policy within the procurement framework for environmental procurement which addresses specific environmental attributes.

Queensland’s State Purchasing Policy has the following objectives which the University of Queensland is required to observe:

• Advance Government priorities - These priorities define the Government’s commitment to advance, through its purchasing, certain social, economic and environmental objectives.
• Achieve value for money –Obtaining the best return and performance for the money spent giving consideration to operation, maintenance and disposal costs as well as non-cost factors such as environmental and human health.
• Ensure Probity and Accountability –Relevant legislation and Government policy must be observed and purchasing carried out according to the principles of ethical behaviour and fair dealing. This involves advancing the interests of the University in all transactions and promoting a high level of credibility with suppliers’ representatives. (Queensland Government 2000)

Business, Industry and NGO’s

There are a number of groups that promote environmental innovation and greener product delivery in the Australian market place and have facilitated individual company commitment to green procurement (AELA 2004). These include the Buy Recycled Business Alliance (BRBA) and the Barton Group. The Australian Environmental Labelling Association has developed a number of standards and has started to build a database of products and materials that meet their environmental criteria. There are also groups such as the Green Procurement Network and knowledge networks such as Ecospecifier for the construction industry. Businesses and Industry Groups are increasingly responding to new market expectation and are now readily utilizing recycled and renewable resources in their product mix. A number of forums have been set up by industry to promote the procurement of environmentally sensitive products. See the resources page for links to these and many other sources of information about green procurement.


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