



Suggested Environmental Questions to Use in an RFP/RFI for Office Supplies

Consider the following questions in Request for Proposals (RFPs) or Requests for Information (RFIs) to assess the ability to provide environmentally preferable products (EPP). Office supply companies have made significant progress in identifying greener products in catalogs so many of the questions will be answered Yes. IF you have questions or comments on this resource, email gsc@practicegreenhealth.org.

#	Questions	Preferred Answer	Rationale
1	Does your company label products and supplies in your online catalog with environmental attributes? (Y/N) If yes, explain how this is done	Yes	Suppliers must be careful to identify greener products with qualified and verified claims to avoid greenwashing and misleading purchasers.
2	Does your online catalog allow search capabilities specifically for "green" or environmentally preferable products? (Yes/No) If yes, explain.	Yes	Customers should be able to easily find products that are environmentally preferable.
3	Do you offer any educational resources or provide links to additional information on available environmentally preferable products? (Y/N)	Yes	One organization saw a dramatic increase in purchasing EPP products because of the supplier's educational campaign.[1]
4	Do you identify in catalogs (print and online) products with any of the following single or multiple environmental attributes:		

a	Percentage postconsumer recycled content (Yes/No)	Yes	<p>Postconsumer recycled content material is a material or finished product that has served its intended use and has been diverted or recovered from waste destined for disposal, having completed its life as a consumer item. Basically, it is the material collected from recycling programs. It is calculated as a percentage of total weight of the product. Steel is excluded from consideration as it commonly contains recycled content. This does not include preconsumer (sometimes referred to as postindustrial) recycled content which are recovered materials obtained from manufacturers.</p>
b	Not made with natural rubber latex (Yes/No)	Yes	<p>Latex is natural rubber latex that comes from a liquid found in tropical rubber trees. Liquid latex is processed to make many medical and dental supplies, including gloves, blood pressure cuffs, urinary catheters, dental dams and material used to fill root canals, as well as tourniquets and equipment for resuscitation. Non-latex substitutes (synthetic latex) can be found for all of these latex-containing items. The protein in rubber can cause an allergic reaction in some people. This reaction can range from sneezing to anaphylactic shock, which is a serious condition that requires immediate medical attention, http://www.mayoclinic.org/diseases-conditions/latex-allergy/basics/definition/con-20024233.</p>
ener	Green Seal or UL ECOLOGO certified (Yes/No)	Yes	<p>These two organizations offer multi-attribute environmental certifications for several types of MRO products such as cleaners, disinfectants, hand soaps and sanitizers, floor polishes and strippers, janitorial paper products, paints and coatings, etc. Green Seal-certified products are listed at www.greenseal.org/FindGreenSealProductsAndServices.aspx. UL/EcoLogo's Sustainable Products Guide lists certified products, http://productguide.ulenvironment.com/QuickSearch.aspx.</p>

d	EPA Energy Star certified (Yes/No)	Yes	ENERGY STAR labeled products reduce greenhouse gas emissions and other pollutants caused by the inefficient use of energy and the label makes it easier for purchasers to identify and purchase energy efficient products. Products can earn the ENERGY STAR label by meeting the energy efficiency requirements set forth in ENERGY STAR specifications.
e	EPA Water Sense certified (Yes/No)	Yes	EPA WaterSense helps consumers save water by labeling products that have been independently verified to reduce water use. For more information, see http://www.epa.gov/WaterSense/ .
f	EPA Safer Choice certified (Yes/No)	Yes	EPA's Safer Choice Program identifies products that are safer for human health and the environment (certified to meet environmental standard). Types of products available through an office supply contract may include floor cleaners, dish and laundry detergents, hand soaps, furniture polishes, deodorizers, stain removers, etc. A list of Safer Choice certified products can be found at http://www2.epa.gov/saferchoice/products .
g	Certified as compostable? (Yes/No)	Yes	Several organizations certify compostable products. In the U.S., there is one called the Biodegradable Products Institute (BPI) which is a professional association promoting the use and recycling of biodegradable materials via composting. Certified products meet the requirements in ASTM D6400 and D6868.
i	Certified as low/no volatile organic compounds (VOCs) (Yes/No)	Yes	There are several certifications for low or no VOCs, including Scientific Certification Systems Indoor Advantage, GREENGUARD, Green Seal (multi-attributes).

j	Certified AP nontoxic, conforming to ASTM D 4236? (Y/N)	Yes	The Art and Creative Materials Institute (ACMI) is an international association seeking to promote safety in art and creative products through its certification program. Certified products are given a non-toxic (AP Seal) or carry the appropriate health warning label (CL Seal). Find certified products at http://www.acminet.org/index.php?option=com_certifiedproducts&view=certifiedproducts&Itemid=66 .
5	Are products containing antimicrobials identified in product descriptions? (Y/N)	Yes	Purchasers may want to avoid products containing antimicrobials. Antimicrobial products kill or slow the spread of microorganisms. Microorganisms include bacteria, viruses, protozoans, and fungi such as mold and mildew. Some health care facilities may wish to avoid products with antimicrobials because overuse and unnecessary use of antimicrobials may contribute to the growing number of antimicrobial-resistant bacterial infections. Serious questions have been raised about the effectiveness of antimicrobials. A 2003 report by the CDC found no data to support its use as a sound effective infection-control strategy.
6	Are products containing polyvinyl chloride (PVC) identified in product descriptions? (Yes/No)	Yes	Purchasers may want to avoid products containing polyvinyl chloride. Many health care facilities prefer PVC-free items in order to reduce the release of a by-product, dioxin, created in the manufacturing (and incineration) process.
7	Will you provide annual purchasing reports on purchases of environmentally preferable products to enable organizations to measure success? (Y/N) If yes, will the report list items purchased (SKU number and product description), EPP attributes, the total quantity purchased per item and the total expenditures per item? (Yes/No)	Yes	Usage reports on EPP products can be a useful tool to evaluate success, establish benchmarks, and identify opportunities to bid only non-EPP products when possible.
8	Do you offer a toner cartridge take-back/recycling program at all delivery locations? (Y/N)	Yes	Most office supply companies offer this service.
9	Do you offer a battery take-back/recycling program at all delivery locations? (Y/N)	Yes	This may encourage office suppliers to support collection of batteries but this service may not be available, or be free.

10	Can you continue to supply additional EPP products as markets develop? (Y/N)	Yes	Office suppliers should be encouraged to add new EPP products as available.
11	If applicable, can you demonstrate that selected vendors for remanufactured toner cartridges have less than a 3% failure rate? (Y/N/NA)	Yes	A 3% failure rate should not be exceeded. Any supplier who exceeds this should be removed from the catalog.
12	Do you use any alternatively fueled vehicles or fuel efficient fleet? (Y/N)	Yes	Suppliers should be encouraged to adopt strategies to show corporate environmental responsibility.
13	Is your company a registered EPA SmartWay Transport Shipper Partner? (Yes/No)	Yes	EPA's SmartWay Program is a public-private initiative that reduces transportation related emissions that affect climate change, reduce environmental risk for companies and increase global energy security. Over 3,000 partners participate saving \$20 billion in fuel costs. EPA SmartWay provides metrics to benchmark success. For more information, see http://www.epa.gov/smartway/ .
14	Does your company and all entities that manage your distribution offer to take-back secondary packaging materials for reuse? (Y/N) If so, list what materials are accepted.	Yes	Secondary packaging is used to get the product from point A to point B and tends to be discarded. It includes boxes, tape, void fill material and pallet stretch film. (Primary packaging makes direct contact with the product.) Much of this material can be reused or recycled. If suppliers answer Yes to this question and take back all packaging materials, then the question about polystyrene and recyclable packaging may not be as important. However, some packaging materials may not get returned through a Take Back program.

15	Will you prohibit the use of polystyrene packaging materials if awarded this contract? (Yes/No)	Yes	Polystyrene (CAS 9003-53-6) is a plastic polymer from the monomer styrene. It comes in many forms: sheet, expanded or extruded foam, or as oriented polystyrene. What is commonly known as Styrofoam™ refers only to the extruded form of polystyrene. Also referred to as 'PS' with the SPI (Society of the Plastics Industry) resin code 6, polystyrene is difficult for hospitals to recycle and there are alternatives. Polystyrene is made with styrene. The International Agency for Research on Cancer (IARC) classifies styrene as a possible carcinogen. Foam blowing agents (called hydrochlorofluorocarbons, HCFCs) used to make polystyrene foam are compounds that have an ozone depletion potential .
16	Will your company set a plan with purchasing entities to consolidate deliveries to reduce your carbon footprint? (Yes/No) If yes, explain how you will document this	Yes	

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^[1] Refers to activity at the Alameda County General Services Agency briefly described in StopWaste.Org's fact sheet, "Environmentally Preferable Nonpaper Office Supplies," www.stopwaste.org/epp