

Environmentally Preferable Purchasing

Prioritizing the consumption of products and services that reduce impact on climate



(Photo courtesy of Connecticut's Official State Website)

The Impact

Environmentally preferable purchasing (EPP) programs work to promote both community health and sustainable conservation of resources. In turn, they aim to reduce man-made emissions, prevent pollution and increase sustainable industry competitiveness.

Description

Environmentally preferable purchasing policies prioritize procuring goods and services with a reduced impact on human health and the environment in comparison to other products serving the same purpose. These sustainable purchases take into consideration post-consumer recycled content, energy efficiency, air emissions, hazardous substances, water efficiency, responsible production and other factors. In California, these policies include a wide range of purchases, from paper for copiers to travel expenses, in an effort to reduce the quantity and toxicity of waste in California.

California policy promotes public entities to purchase environmentally preferable products that have a reduced impact on human health and the environment, considering various factors such as repairability, durability, recycled content, and recyclability. Law requires public entities to purchase environmentally preferable products that are repairable, durable, made with recycled content, and able to be recycled again. For instance, Alameda County's model EPP policy rewards manufacturers and vendors that reduce environmental impacts in their production and distribution systems or services, and encourages the use of agricultural fibers, chlorine-free manufacturing processes, wood from

sustainably harvested forests, and other environmentally friendly practices that conserve natural resources and reduce community hazards.

Where It's Been Implemented

The federal EPP program has generated significant financial and environmental benefits to the government. Environmentally preferable electronic products saved the government \$2 billion in 2021. Globally, the more than 299 million EPP tech products purchased worldwide during 2021 will result in the reduction of 37 billion kilograms of CO2 equivalent (equal to taking over 8 million average passenger cars off the road for a year) and 2.3 billion kilograms of solid waste (equivalent to the annual waste generation of over 1.2 million U.S. households)

In California, Public Contract Code 12400-1404 calls for the purchasing of goods and services whose production, manufacturing and distribution ensure a lesser or reduced effect on human and environmental health. The Department of General Services leads the state's effort to purchase sustainably through its [Buying Green Guide](#).

CalRecycle cites StopWaste in Alameda County as a model EPP policy. StopWaste's model template for EPP, created in 2009, includes strategies for source reduction, recycled content products, energy and water efficient products, green building practices, landscaping practices, toxic pollution prevention and bio-based products.

The City of San Carlos, Calif., drafted an EPP proposal in 2015 that requires buyers to maintain a log to track items purchased, purchase prices, vendors and frequency of environmentally preferred purchases. The logs are used to audit purchasing trends and adherence to the policy annually.

Key Drivers

In California and around the world, wasteful practices often harm both the natural world and community health. In California alone during 2019, 42.2 million tons of material were disposed of in landfills, with an estimated recycling rate of only 37 percent. Landfills emit hazardous air pollutants that can impact the health of nearby residents. Incinerators spew toxic chemicals known to cause cancer, respiratory problems and disrupt the endocrine system. EPP policies can ensure that waste produced by our cities and businesses ends up recycled or disposed of sustainably instead of potentially harming community health.

Key Factors for Success

The threat of climate change is driving greater interest in sustainable practices. New products and ones that are becoming more popular, such as electric vehicles, are causing cities and businesses to examine their EPP policies.

Key Obstacles

In order for environmentally preferable purchasing policies to be successful, cities and businesses need to be willing to revitalize and reinvest in these programs. They also must be fiscally responsible and timely in overseeing sustainable purchasing.

Background

EPP policies began gaining more widespread traction around 2008, when they were primarily focused on buying recyclable paper and sustainable office supplies. Now these policies encompass many more products, including a preference for electric vehicles, energy-efficient equipment, water-saving fixtures and even environmentally preferable road construction materials.



References and Resources

- [California Department of General Services' Buying Green Guide](#)
- [StopWaste's Model Environmentally Preferable Purchasing Policy](#)
- [City of San Carlos' \(Calif.\) EPP policy](#)
- [Alameda County's \(Calif.\) model EPP policy](#)
- [Responsible Purchasing Network's list of green purchasing policies](#)
- [Responsible Purchasing Network's Model EPP policy](#)
- [U.S. Environmental Protection Agency's EPP program](#)
- [San Mateo County's \(Calif.\) Environmental Procurement Policy](#)
- [California's EPP](#)
- [California's EPP training program for EPP purchases](#)

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