

BUYING RECYCLED PRODUCTS

Buying recycled products (products with recycled content) has many benefits, including creating markets (closing the loop), resource management, energy conservation, lowering greenhouse gas emissions, reducing disposal, and creating jobs and economic development. China's limits on its imports of recyclables has emphasized the need for government and the private sector to increase recycling market development, including buying recycled products.

There are many federal, state, local, and private programs to buy recycled products. The [EPA Guidelines](#) list standards for 61 product categories. We have designed this fact sheet for government agencies, but you can use it in private companies as well.

Listed below are key elements in establishing a buy recycled program:

Commitment - Commit to buying recycled products. The commitment must begin with a support statement from the organization's top leader. Buyers, recycling coordinators, and users must also participate in the program to buy recycled products by following the steps below. Develop a program to educate employees about the need to buy recycled products and how to buy them.

Get Started - Review your current purchases and take credit for recycled products you are already buying. Look at the items below and evaluate where you can increase your purchases and use of recycled products.

Variety of Recycled Products - There are many opportunities to buy recycled products. They include products for offices, vehicles, buildings, landscaping, construction, and other areas. They also include remanufactured products. Listed below are examples of recycled products:

OFFICES

- **Office paper products** - copy paper, writing pads, letterhead, envelopes, and paper for publications
- **Tissue and towel products**
- **Cardboard boxes**
- **Office supplies** - binders, calendars, folders, letter openers, pens and pencils, rulers, etc.
- **Trash and recycling containers and bags**
- **Remanufactured items** - furniture, computers, office equipment, and toner cartridges
- **Electronics** - computers, monitors, multi-function printers, scanners, copiers, and televisions

VEHICLES - re-refined oil, recycled antifreeze, recycled and remanufactured auto parts, and retread tires

CONSTRUCTION

- **Building** - insulation, carpet, tiles, steel framing, plastic partitions, pallets, paint, roofing shingles, and counter tops
- **General** - aggregate, concrete, asphalt, drainage pipe, and parking stops

PLASTIC LUMBER - decking, fence posts, picnic tables, park benches, furniture, and piers

CLOTHING - shirts, pants, uniforms, and safety vests

COMPOST AND MULCH

Price, Quality, and Availability - The keys to making a buy recycled program work are keeping recycled product prices low, ensuring high quality, and finding available products. You can reduce the unit cost of recycled products through shopping around, increasing the number of vendors, buying large quantities, life cycle costing, and cooperative purchasing. Test recycled products where needed (or obtain other users' experience and test results). Prepare performance specifications so that recycled products have the quality to meet your needs. Research state contracts, vendor lists, online listings, and cooperative purchasing agreements to find available products.

Specifications - Include language in all specifications that you favor recycled products (even if you are not requesting recycled products in the bid). Change your specifications for recycled products to include the highest minimum recycled content standard (that does not significantly limit competition or increase price). Request products with postconsumer materials (materials used by the final consumer that would otherwise go to disposal) where possible. Ask vendors to certify the recycled content in their products. Use existing standards, such as the EPA guidelines, where available. You may also want to use third-party environmental certification programs (ecolabels) such as [EPEAT](#), [Green Seal](#), [GreenCircle Certified](#), [Intertek](#), [SCS Global Services](#), or [UL](#)

Testing - Test recycled products where needed or ask other users for test results and/or user experience. This will help make buyers and users comfortable that recycled products are high quality items that will meet their intended end use.

Contractors and Grantees - Do not limit your recycled purchases to products only. Request recycled content for your contracts and service agreements as well. This can include printing, building and road construction, vehicle maintenance, landscaping, janitorial, and other services.

Cooperative Purchasing - Buy recycled products cooperatively (both within the organization and cooperating with other organizations) so that you can find different products and lower unit prices for recycled products.

Closed Loop Recycling - Coordinate buy recycled programs with existing collection efforts so that, where possible, you are buying products manufactured from the recycled raw materials you collect. If available, work with recycling market development agencies such as those in [Minnesota](#), [Ohio](#), [Pennsylvania](#), and [South Carolina](#).

Source Reduction and Environmentally Preferable Products - Do not limit your program to buying products with recycled content. Buy products that are more durable, reusable, recyclable, quieter, more energy efficient, less toxic, and packaged with fewer materials.

Record Keeping and Evaluation - Keep good records on your purchases of recycled products to provide reports to your supervisors, customers, employees, and the public. Share information on successes and establish baseline data to evaluate the program and determine ways to improve it. Include information on the products purchased, quantities, recycled content (percentages and material types), dollars spent, and user experience with the product. EPA's [Waste Wise](#) program and [environmental benefits calculator](#) can help with data collection and analysis.

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