How to write a green purchasing policy

Environmentally friendly, or "green" purchasing, is a process to reduce the environmental impact of office products by minimizing unnecessary product purchasing or choosing products that have a reduced environmental impact. The process starts with a clear purchasing policy.

Once established, a green purchasing policy will help save your company money, reduce your negative environmental impact, and set an example for corporate social responsibility. Before you begin to write a green purchasing policy, it is important to gain approval and commitment from stakeholders.

How to develop a green purchasing policy:

1. Perform a baseline survey or environmental audit of your workplace

Through this audit you will determine which areas your company needs to improve upon, and which areas might need total revamping. Areas to focus on during this initial assessment are: energy efficiency of appliances and lighting, water efficiency of appliances, from where your company purchases various items and materials, recycling content of purchased materials (such as paper and packaging materials), green building design concepts, whether or not your company recycles and/or composts, and potential for landscaping and/or office plants.

2. Review the United States Green Building Council's Policy Model

This model provides an easy to update and effective means of communicating your policy goals.

3. After reviewing your baseline results, establish your green purchasing policy guidelines.

Some key areas to focus on are:

- **Energy Efficient Appliances**. Look for the Energy Star logo on any office appliances you purchase. These appliances have been approved as the most energy efficient items on the market today. Visit Energy Star for more information. Consider purchasing computers that are EPEAT certified.
- **Energy Efficient Lighting**. Use of LED light bulbs and light sensors can drastically reduce the amount of energy used by lights in your office, saving your office money and keeping carbon dioxide out of the air.
- **Water Efficient Appliances.** This includes low-flow faucets and shower heads, high performance toilets and dishwashers. Fixtures should meet WaterSense guidelines.
- **Toxins and Pollutants.** Be sure to investigate the chemical and toxic content of all products that your company purchases and uses. Try to avoid chemically based

products whenever possible. This includes office paper and office supplies, cleaning supplies, and building materials. Many of these products are available as environmentally friendly GreenSeal or Ecologo certified products.

- **Bio-Based Products.** Look to purchase natural or bio-based products whenever possible. Many bio-based products mimic the surfactant, disinfectant, and pesticide actions of common products without the health risks. Products include Greenseal, Ecologo, and pesticides on the San Francisco Environment least toxic pesticides list.
- **Recycling.** Make sure your office is buying recycled paper goods (office paper, napkins, paper towels, etc.). Also look to purchase other items that may have been made from recycled materials. 100% post consumer is best, but above 30% is common for most products. Specify in your policy what kind of material will be used if your office building is ever renovated, and make sure to include specifications about using reclaimed and recycled materials.
- **Packaging.** Make it a policy to buy products with minimal packaging. Also try to buy products that are packaged in natural materials like paper and cardboard, and avoid plastic and Styrofoam packaging. Don't forget to recycle.
- **Green Building.** Include in your purchasing policy a section about LEED certification. Make it a policy that any updates/renovations to your office building shall meet the standards referenced by LEED.
- **Landscaping and office plants.** Office plants make your workspace more lively and vibrant while improving indoor air quality. You may also want to consider putting in a living wall, a wall filled with easy to care for plants. For more information, see 'What is a Living Wall?'
- **What happens at the end of a product's life?** Can the product be thrown away? Can it be recycled? Are there toxic components of the product that need to be handled carefully (i.e. mercury in light bulbs)? These are all questions you should ask yourself b*efore* you purchase a product. These questions should also be addressed in your waste management policy.

4. Set goals after completing your baseline.

Goals may include reducing the amount of packaging materials your office uses by X pounds per month, reducing energy used by office appliances by X amount per quarter, increasing the volume of materials your office recycles by X gallons per year, etc. Setting concrete goals makes your green purchasing policy less abstract and more achievable.

5. Follow up with implementing your office's green purchasing policy and monitor goals.

You and your colleagues have put in a lot of time and effort writing a wonderful green purchasing policy, but your work is not done yet. You must monitor your office/company and make sure that they are following the guidelines of the policy in order to ensure that your

goals are being met. Reporting should be simple, but follow the metrics established in the goals. Don't forget to review your policy annually and make necessary changes.

Examples and guidelines for an environmental audit:

Environmental Audit (for schools)

Conducting an Environmental Audit

Environmental Audit: A Simple Guide

CNT's Green Building Manual (Green Building Procedures section)

Useful links for writing a green purchasing policy:

Adopt a Green Purchasing Policy

Buying Smart

EPA Green Purchasing Guides

Green Purchasing: A Guide for Local Governments and Communities

Green Purchasing Best Practices Guide Book

Green Purchasing Guide

Green Procurement Policy Examples

Posted by Green Per Square Foot in Sustainability Education
Information from Knowledge Center at Green Per Square Foot