

SUSTAINABLE ACQUISITION

*This newsletter will be posted to the OAM website located at:
http://www.osec.doc.gov/oam/acquisition_management/topics/default.htm*

So what is Sustainable Acquisition?

Did you know that the federal government spends more than \$450 billion annually on goods and services, owns hundreds of thousands of vehicles, manages a real property portfolio of more than 300,000 buildings, and spends more than \$74 billion annually—on IT products and services alone?

All of these activities are necessary to our respective missions, but they also create significant environmental and energy impacts and can impact the health of our colleges, our service contractors, and surrounding communities. Luckily we can use purchasing dollars to reduce those impacts by buying “green.”

“Green purchasing” or “sustainable acquisition” refers to purchasing products with specific environmental attributes and purchasing services under which these products will be supplied or used.

In Federal acquisition, the term “green purchasing” was formerly used but has recently coined the term “sustainable acquisition.” Many agency purchasing plans--such as Department of Commerce’s “[Green Procurement Program](#)” --are still referred to as green purchasing plans -- or environmentally preferable purchasing plans. Upon issuance of pending changes to the Federal Acquisition Regulation (FAR), Commerce Acquisition Manual 1323.70 will be revised to implement those changes and be retitled the “Sustainable Acquisition Program.”

Under various statutes, executive orders, and FAR Part 23, **agencies are required to specify and purchase products with the following attributes:**

- Recycled content
- Biobased content
- Energy efficient (Energy Star, Federal Energy Management Program-designated, or Federal Energy Management Program low standby power)
- Electronic Product Environmental Assessment Tool (EPEAT-registered)
- Water efficient (e.g., EPA WaterSense certified)
- Low or no-toxic or hazardous constituents
- Alternatives to ozone depleting substances

*Note that, except for EPEAT, these are all single attributes (e.g., energy efficiency). Agencies can also specify multiple attributes (e.g., energy efficiency, recycled content, reduced packaging). At this time, however, EPEAT is the only required multiple attribute program (e.g., design, energy efficiency, recycling).

There are exceptions for performance, price and availability. **Contracting officials should document the contract file when a determination is made that a green or sustainable product will not meet the agency’s performance needs, is only available at an unreasonable price, or is not reasonably available.**

A true example: a federal agency purchased appliances to be shipped to an overseas facility. The Energy Star program applies to appliances. However, the overseas facility uses direct current, while Energy Star is designed for products used domestically (i.e., products using alternating current). Therefore the agency was not required to purchase Energy Star appliances for the overseas facility.

How do you know which products have “green” requirements?

You and your requesting officials can find designated products by visiting [GSA’s Green Procurement Compilation \(GPC\) tool](#). The GPC tool lists all currently designated products by category (e.g., office electronics); provides content or other purchasing recommendations from the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), Department of Energy (DOE), or Department of Agriculture (USDA); identifies sources such as GSA’s Multiple Award Schedules or Federal Strategic Sourcing Initiative blanket purchase agreements; and provides related information such as life cycle costing. The GPC also links to the EPA, DOE and USDA environmental programs, in case you need more information on individual products.

Note that products are often supplied or used as part of service contracts, such as a janitorial services contract. The Office of Management and Budget identified the following services that should include green or sustainable product requirements, including but not limited to:

- IT services, including equipment leasing
- Meeting and conference services
- Building construction, renovation, repair
- Building operations and maintenance
- Landscaping services
- Pest Management

The GPC’s services section provides guidance on greening these types of services, including sample contract language.

What about third party standards and labels?

Agencies can and do use third party standards and labels to purchase “green” or “sustainable” products. In November 2013, EPA proposed guidance for federal agency use of third party standards and labels. EPA is now working on completing and piloting the guidance over the next year.

EPA describes the guidance as follows: *They are intended to help federal purchasers identify and buy environmentally preferable products. Federal agencies must meet federal mandates that 95 percent of their acquisitions are sustainable, such as buying environmentally preferable products.*

Many federal agencies are buying products with federal eco-labels, such as Energy Star, Watersense, and Design for the Environment—labels that identify products meeting strict federal standards for energy, water and safer chemicals; however, there are many other products that are not covered by federal eco-labels. The challenge for federal buyers is sorting through these hundreds of other products with non-governmental standards and eco-labels that claim to be safer or environmentally friendly. The draft guidelines are intended to help federal buyers select those private eco-labels and standards that are environmentally preferable and appropriate for federal procurement.

The next issue of *Sustainable Acquisition* will take a closer look at GSA’s Green Procurement Compilation (GPC) tool.

If you have questions about “buying sustainably” please consult [Commerce Acquisition Manual 1323.70](#) or contact the Office of Acquisition Management, Policy and Oversight Division, Attention: Nancy Barrere at nbarrere@doc.gov.