

Section 7:

Close the Loop! Buy Recycled

As every business person knows, success is a function of consumer interest in your product or service.

The recycled product manufacturing industry has grown by leaps and bounds due to an ever-growing supply of recyclable material and demand for recycled-content products. As demand has grown, the variety of these products has expanded, while the cost to consumers has declined.

Why Buy Recycled?

In Montgomery County, it is estimated that businesses generate almost half of all of the waste generated in the County. The County requires businesses to recycle in order to minimize the amount of waste going to disposal facilities.



In order to keep recycling viable, businesses need to progress beyond just recycling by buying recycled-content products. This step is known as “closing the loop”; in effect, completing the recycling process.

Buying recycled-content products ensures there are markets for goods that contain recycled materials. When your business buys recycled, it helps ensure the success of recycling programs.

By buying recycled-content products, you also help create long-term, stable markets for recyclable materials, which ultimately drives down the consumer prices of these goods. Today, many recycled-content products already cost less than their counterparts made of virgin materials.

The manufacture of products from recycled materials also reduces our dependence on virgin raw materials and often saves energy compared to virgin manufacturing processes. It can also reduce air and water pollution.

Buying recycled also makes a difference in how your customers and clients see you. Many businesses are requesting recycled-content products from their vendors. Some consultants are finding buy-recycled clauses in their clients’ contracts.

Finally, buying recycled may save your business money because it can reduce your procurement costs over the long term.

How To Buy Recycled

Establish a Policy

The first step to setting up a buy-recycled program is to establish a buy-recycled policy for your business. It will lay the groundwork for all your purchases. Your policy can include all or some of the following elements:

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- A general preference for recycled-content products.
- A price preference, whereby your business is willing to pay a higher price (such as 5 or 10 percent or greater) for recycled paper or other recycled-content products.
- A set-aside or goal where a certain percentage of total purchases must have recycled content.

Pre-consumer vs. Post-consumer: What's the Difference?

These two terms are used to indicate the source of recycled material that goes into recycled content-products.

Pre-consumer material is generated by industry during production processes.

Post-consumer waste is generated by customers and separated from the waste stream for recycling.

Examples of pre-consumer materials include materials generated by converting rolls of paper into envelopes, unsold newspapers and magazines, and plastic materials generated during production and not used by consumers. Most industries already recover and use a large percentage of pre-consumer waste because it tends to be cleaner, easier to use and higher in value. In the paper industry, nearly 90 percent of pre-consumer waste is already recovered by manufacturers and therefore does not enter into the solid waste stream.

Post-consumer materials would generally end up being disposed of if they are not recycled. Therefore, purchases of recycled products must emphasize the use of post-consumer materials in order to create markets for these materials.

To be successful, everyone must subscribe to and play a role in enforcing the policy. Management should establish the policy and evaluate it for changes when necessary. Purchasing agents and buyers must integrate the policy into their procurement practices and procedures, and monitor recycled products for their effectiveness. Other staff can play a role by specifying use of recycled products in bids, publicizing the buy-recycled policy and providing feedback on successes (and failures) of recycled-content products.

Research the Market

Buying recycled may be a brand-new concept for your business. Like anything new, it will require you to do a little research to determine what is right for you. There are three considerations to keep in mind when shopping for recycled goods—availability, quality and cost. Examine these issues before making a purchase.

Availability – When the first Official Recycled Products Guide was published in 1989, it listed 170 manufacturers and vendors of recycled products. Four years later, the same publication contained more than 4,500 listings. The availability and variety of products has increased dramatically. However, many buyers are still not aware of how much the marketplace for recycled-content goods has changed.

The first place to look for information is from your current vendors. They are familiar with your business and should know your needs. If they can't help you, ask around within your industry or read trade journals – many of these have published helpful information about buying recycled.

Quality – Don't be put off by the outdated notion that recycled-content products are inferior. In the past, some recycled products did compare unfavorably to products made from new materials. But increased demand and major changes in technology have resulted in improved products that are competitive in quality with virgin goods.

Cost – Another mistake is to assume that recycled-content products are more expensive than equivalent virgin products. In fact, some recycled-content products are already less expensive than their virgin counterparts. Comparison shopping, bulk purchases, competitive bid processes and calculating the life-cycle cost of a product are the best ways to control costs. Look around for vendors that are willing to help you find the products you want.

Require Contractors To Use Recycled Products

Many of the products and services your business obtains are secured through contractual arrangements and grant agreements. These provide an excellent opportunity to expand your buying power by encouraging outside contractors to use recycled-content products in their service to you. For example, you can require printers to use recycled-content paper and nontoxic inks for all printing jobs.

You can also request that any organization doing business with you use recycled-content products.

Purchase Cooperatively To Reduce Costs

If some recycled-content products are beyond your buy-recycled policy's limit, consider purchasing them through cooperative arrangements with other businesses. Cooperative purchasing is a system by which similar businesses save money by pooling their purchases into a single bid instead of buying products individually.

Cooperative purchasing is an old concept that has a new application: purchasing recycled-content products. Cooperative purchasing may sacrifice a bit of your purchasing authority, but offers many benefits:

- Lower unit costs
- Increased volume of recycled purchases
- Increased availability of recycled-content product
- Increased buying-recycled participation among more businesses

Businesses which participate in cooperative purchasing arrangements buy off the same contract, so definitions, percentages and standards are the same. This allows manufacturers to produce these items in larger quantities as regular stock items rather than as specialty items.

Evaluate What Products Your Business Can Use

The paper industry was one of the first to market its products as containing recycled content, so most early buy-recycled efforts concentrated on procuring recycled-content paper, especially printing and writing papers. However, many of today's office products are available with recycled content, so your recycled-content purchases conceivably could reach to all aspects of your business.

To determine which products fit your business needs, follow these three steps:

1. Review current purchases to determine which recycled-content products are already being purchased.
2. Examine product specifications to determine if the maximum amount of recycled-content materials (and post-consumer waste) is being requested.
3. Examine product and contract lists to determine where you can substitute recycled-content products for virgin products or include recycled-content products in future bids. The following list will give you a good idea of the range of recycled-content products currently on the market.

Office products

- printing and writing papers
- tissue and towel products
- trash can liners
- office supplies (bulletin boards, calendars, folders, letter openers, note holders and trays, pens, pencils, push pins, rulers, scissors, etc)



Vehicle fleets

- re-refined oil
- recycled antifreeze
- retread tires



Construction products

- building insulation
- compost/mulch
- cement and concrete containing fly ash

Transportation products

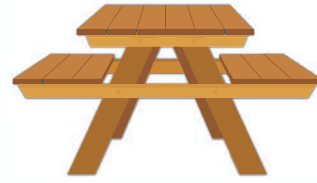
- plastics (a-frames, fences, guardrail, posts, traffic cones, etc.)
- compost/mulch along roadsides/stormwater management projects

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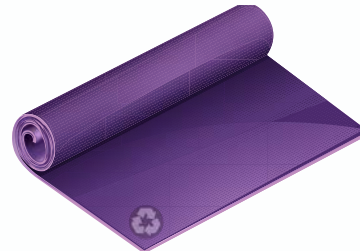
Recreation and parks

- plastic lumber (benches, picnic tables, playgrounds, etc.)



Other products

- absorbents
- bags (paper)
- yard waste containers
- curbside collection containers
- clothing and industrial rags
- food service containers (recyclable or compostable)
- paper and plastic pallets
- inside trash and recycling containers
- refurbished office equipment
- recycled ink/toner cartridges
- packaging material
- furniture
- auto parts
- flooring/carpeting
- mats (plastic and rubber)
- animal bedding
- packaging materials
- shower dividers/toilet/partitions/wall panels
- industrial wipers (paper)
- urinal screens
- solvents
- wallboard
- plastic (partitions, decking, fences/posts, parking stops and drainpipe)
- asphalt (rubberized asphalt/glassphalt)
- benches (bus stops, etc.)



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When Should I Publicize My Buy-Recycled Effort?

Continually. Mention your buy-recycled program in reports and send out news releases about how many recycled-content products are purchased, how much money is spent and what the products are. The publicity is good for your business and it will encourage other businesses to develop similar programs.



How To Keep Track of Your Program

As you implement your program to buy recycled-content products, establish a record-keeping and evaluation system. It will help you monitor the success of the program, allow you to publicize your efforts and exchange information with other businesses.

Set up a system to designate each recycled-content product in your purchasing reports (a separate code number or other distinction will suffice). The following work sheet outlines the information you will need for your records.

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Work Sheet for Recycled-Content Product Purchases

Product or Service Purchased _____

Number of Units Requested _____

Contract Number _____ Duration of Contract _____

Buyer _____

Using Department _____

Percentage and definition of recycled content requested in bid

Pre-consumer _____% Post-consumer _____% Total recycled content _____%

Bidders (circle successful bidder)

	Bidder	Pre-consumer	Post-consumer	Total	Price
1.	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
2.	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
3.	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____

Price Preference Paid (if any) _____

Was this a cooperative purchase? _____ If yes, list participants below:

Total dollars/units purchased (vendors should be required to provide information on actual usage)

Was there any good or bad feedback from users?

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RECYCLED PRODUCTS GUIDE

This SORRT Resource List (Section 8 of this Handbook) identifies companies that sell recycled paper, paper products, and other products that contain recycled material. Montgomery County has compiled this listing through various sources and does not present it as a complete directory of all vendors that service Montgomery County, nor offer it as an endorsement of any of the companies.

IF YOU'RE NOT BUYING RECYCLED, YOU'RE NOT FULLY RECYCLING. FULLY CLOSE THE RECYCLING LOOP. One factor influencing the stability and long-term success of recycling programs is the market condition for recyclable materials. If there is strong demand for products and materials manufactured from recyclables, then there is a constant need for greater supply of recycled feedstock. This situation then helps to ensure that there are viable markets for the materials which you separate from the trash and recycle. Therefore, it is vital to keep up (and even increase) demand for recycled-content products and materials; your organization helps to increase this critical demand.

"BUY RECYCLED" Support recycling by purchasing recycled-content items. The quality and variety of products are improving. Pricing is, in many instances, comparable to pricing for virgin materials. Recycled paper varieties include – colored paper, white office paper, computer paper, card stock, envelopes, bathroom tissue, and hand towels. When ordering, ask for paper made from the highest percentage of recycled content material, preferably post-consumer.

For additional information on purchasing recycled products, contact the Montgomery County Business Recycling Program at 3-1-1 or (240) 777-0311.

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