

# Green Purchasing

Green purchasing (also known as green procurement) involves choosing products and services that reduce our impact on the environment. It is rooted in the principles of waste reduction and pollution prevention. Green purchasing also seeks to eliminate risks to human health. There are opportunities to reduce our environmental impact and costs at every stage during a product's lifecycle and within the supply chain.

## Product Lifecycle

While price can often be the determining factor influencing our choice to buy a product or service, price may not reflect the actual cost of a product over the long term. Every purchase has a potential social, economic or environmental impact. Many impacts are not obvious or immediate. Some impacts may only become obvious when we take a more holistic view of the lifecycle of a product or service.

A product's lifecycle includes all of the activities that go into making, selling, using, transporting and disposing of a product or service, throughout the whole supply chain. When making a purchasing decision, there is value in assessing the impact of a product or service over its whole lifecycle and selecting options that create the least impact on the environment.

The following diagram shows the lifecycle of products:



## Did you know?

Paper manufacturing is the third-largest user of fossil fuels in the world.<sup>1</sup>



## Green Purchasing at UAlberta

The University of Alberta is committed to integrating sustainability into the many aspects of university life. Our general intentions are outlined in the university's [Sustainability Commitment and Guiding Principles](#). Specific goals and initiatives are presented in our [Sustainability Plan](#). Green purchasing is one key practice that anyone responsible for purchasing at UAlberta can adopt to incorporate responsible choices into our workplace.

### For Staff and Faculty

The University of Alberta is a major purchaser. Each year, our 15,000 full and part-time employees buy approximately 60 million sheets of paper and millions of dollars' worth of supplies and equipment. In addition, approximately 4,500 devices are used for faxing, printing and scanning.

As a staff or faculty member, you can make a positive impact on the environment every time you purchase a product or service. By analyzing and adjusting your ordering practices, with the help of Supply Management Services and the Office of Sustainability, faculty and staff can reduce the ecological footprint of our purchasing.

#### Make your green purchase in six simple steps

- 1. Get informed!** Visit the Green Purchasing [section](#) of the Office of Sustainability's website, [sustainability.ualberta.ca](http://sustainability.ualberta.ca)
- 2. Ask yourself "Do I really need this product or service?"** It's better to not purchase anything at all or to reuse if possible.
- 3. Identify potential vendors.** Who sells the product or service you require? It is usually better to use one of the University of Alberta's [preferred suppliers](#) to maximize the benefits of order consolidation; however, sometimes the most sustainable solution is found elsewhere.
- 4. Evaluate the sustainability features of your product or service.** Check out the University of Alberta's [green purchasing principles](#) to help you determine which product or service is the most environmentally preferable.
- 5. Compare your options.** When comparing vendors and products, in addition to price, you may also consider quality, service and delivery options; the amount of energy and water used to make and use the product; and the amount of waste generated over the [lifecycle](#) of the product.
- 6. Select your solution and place your order.** You have chosen your product or service and factored environmental impacts into your decision. Now it's time to order your product. Whenever possible, use a preferred supplier and [consolidate your orders](#) to make it worth the trip.

### Did you know?

The University of Alberta has a Preferred Supplier System that consolidates orders to reduce delivery traffic on campus.

## Resources

- Discover how to reduce your paper use today with the [Office Paper Cut Campaign](#).
- Learn how you can reduce the environmental impact of your office's printing through an [Office Document Assessment](#).
- Find out more about green purchasing. Visit the Office of Sustainability's website to express your interest in hosting a [free workshop](#).

## For Students

By buying green, you not only reduce your individual ecological impact you also help increase demand and availability sustainable products.

Simply purchasing notebooks and printer paper that are made from recycled content can have a positive impact. You can also go beyond the materials that you purchase for studying and completing assignments, and consider green options for clothing, food or personal care products.

## Green Purchasing Principles

You have an opportunity to demonstrate environmental leadership and stimulate demand for environmentally-preferred goods and services. Consider the following green purchasing principles when making decisions about the goods you purchase and services you use.

### Reduce

Carefully consider whether the product or service is actually necessary prior to making the purchase. Instead, consider whether the product is available in an electronic format, available used, and if the product is the right size for the job.

### Recycled Content

Whenever possible, choose products that contain recycled content. When choosing between products with different ratios of recycled materials, it's best to go with the product that has the highest post-consumer recycled content.

## Quality & Durability

Consider purchasing quality products that are designed to last. Durable products may cost more at the onset, but will require less frequent replacement. Look for products that are well-made, designed for upgrade, and can be serviced locally or have single parts that are easily replaced.

## Materials

Whenever possible, look for products which are made of natural, unprocessed and chemical-free materials. Choose materials that are ethically sourced, such as wood material from sustainably managed forests.

## Packaging

Consider products with the least amount of packaging that will still protect shipped goods. Choose packaging that's biodegradable or compostable, or forms of packaging that can be reused or returned to the manufacturer or supplier. At UAlberta, you can use the Preferred Supplier System to order in bulk.

## Choice of Vendor

Choose a vendor that views environmental sustainability as a way of doing business, not as a cost of doing business. Consider companies that have a policy and a plan for integrating global environmental commitments into their core business strategy and practices. For purchasing at UAlberta, consider the university's preferred suppliers.

## Third-Party Certified

Whenever possible, select products with one or more eco-certifications. These products meet stringent environmental standards set by a reputable third-party. The Green Purchasing section of [sustainability.ualberta.ca](http://sustainability.ualberta.ca) lists some common third-party certifiers.

## Efficient

If appropriate, purchase products that make the best use of their energy source. Many newer or upgraded models use less energy than similar models produced 10, 20 or even 30 years ago. Energy efficient appliances in Canada are easily identified and compared using third-party certification systems. Once purchased, ensure that the operators follow manufacturer's recommendations for use and service for maximum efficiency.

## Did you know?

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Cleaning chemicals purchased at the university meet EcoLogo™ (formerly known as Environmental Choice Canada) and/or Green Seal™ (USA) regulations. UAlberta's cleaning equipment meets Green Guard certification requirements.

## Reusable

Consider ordering products that are reusable (as opposed to single-use or disposable) or allow sharing with multiple users.

## Order/Supplier Consolidation

Consider consolidating your orders to a weekly or monthly schedule. At UAlberta, Consider minimizing your supplier dealings by using the university's Preferred Supplier System.

## Green Marketing Terms

Our green purchasing principles provide a very useful list of criteria to consider each time you make a purchase. With the growing popularity of sustainable products, some companies use unfair marketing tactics. This practice, often called greenwashing, can make it hard to determine if the materials, efficiency, packaging and recycled content of a product contribute to sustainability.

One key tip to keep in mind when decoding product labels is to look for specific information about the feature they are promoting.

**Here are some common phrases that can be deceptive:**

### All Natural

This vague phrase doesn't give any specific information about the safety or environmental impact of the ingredients or materials used. There are many substances like formaldehyde and arsenic that are natural, but also poisonous. Sometimes natural ingredients may be safe for use, but not harvested in a sustainable way.<sup>2</sup>

### Eco-friendly

On its own, this claim provides little background or context to identify specifically what is environmentally friendly about their product. These words are often graphically designed to mimic the look of a seal or stamp to make it appear as if the product is certified by a third-party.

### Biodegradable

Biodegradation is the process of material breaking down or decomposing and returning materials to the elements found in nature. Biodegradable doesn't necessarily mean the product is especially environmentally friendly, as biodegradation

occurs for almost all materials, but at different rates for different materials. Paper can decompose in two to five months, whereas plastic bags can take over 500 years. This process requires light, air and water to occur and even items that would normally biodegrade relatively quickly may not be able to when sealed in a landfill.<sup>3</sup>

### Compostable

If a product or its packaging is labeled as compostable, it should be able to break down relatively quickly. However some materials require industrial composters in order to decompose properly. They will not break down in your home compost.<sup>4</sup>

### Recyclable

This term means that the product can be recycled into new materials where facilities exist. Not all cities or towns have recycling facilities. Even the University of Alberta uses a different recycling management system than the City of Edmonton.<sup>4</sup>

Learn more about recycling at UAlberta by visiting [sustainability.ualberta.ca/waste](https://sustainability.ualberta.ca/waste).

### Recycled Content

This phrase means that the product contains materials that were recycled. It is usually followed by a percentage that tells you how much of the product is sourced from recycled materials - the higher the percentage, the better.

If the term includes the phrase “post-consumer” then you know that the recycled materials are sourced from products that were recycled after use by the purchaser. If not, the recycled materials may have been generated during the production process.<sup>4</sup>

## Did you know?

Recycling one printer cartridge can save nearly 3.5 liters of oil.<sup>1</sup>

**Sources:**

1. "Waste Fact Sheet". Alberta Environment. 2007.
2. "Avoiding Greenwashing" Green Plus Insitute for Sustainable Development. n.d. Web. Retrieved 27 June, 2013. < <http://gogreenplus.org/nuts-and-bolts-guide/performance-nuts-and-bolts-guide/sustainability-management/avoiding-greenwashing>>
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4. "Shopping 'Green'". Federal Trade Commision. October 2012. Web. Retrieved 27 June 2013. < <http://www.consumer.ftc.gov/articles/0226-shopping-green>>