

The purchasing habits of your company can go a long way towards contributing to your environmental impacts. This is also an area where you can affect the environment in positive ways, by choosing products that support good environmental practice. Simple changes in purchasing habits represent a great opportunity to make big improvements in environmental performance.

## **Understanding what you're purchasing**

Labelling systems are there to help you understand the environmental impacts of the products you're buying. Looking for products labelled or certified to recognised environmental standards will guarantee their production conforms to high standards.

Below, three of the most common label types are explained. In addition, DEFRA produces an introductory 'Shopper's Guide to Green Labels', which is available to download from:  
[www.ecolabel.defra.gov.uk/pdfs/shoppers-guide.pdf](http://www.ecolabel.defra.gov.uk/pdfs/shoppers-guide.pdf)

### **Energy efficiency ratings labels**

All European manufacturers and retailers are required by law to tell you about the energy efficiency of appliances, including: electrical fridges, freezers, dishwashers, air conditioners, and light bulbs.

- Products are generally rated from 'A' to 'G', with 'A' being the most efficient ('A+' and 'A++' for the highest efficiency fridges and freezers).
- The Energy Saving Recommended logo endorses products that are amongst the most energy efficient available. You can find the products listed under this logo at:  
[www.est.org.uk/recommended](http://www.est.org.uk/recommended)

### **Forest Stewardship Council labels**

FSC labels apply to products made from wood, including paper.

- FSC labelled products are independently certified to assure that the wood is sourced from forests that are managed sustainably.
- Further information and lists of certified stockists are available at: [www.fsc.org](http://www.fsc.org)

### **Fair Trade labels**

The Fair Trade Mark ([www.fairtrade.org.uk](http://www.fairtrade.org.uk)) applies to products sourced from developing countries. The Mark assures that the product meets international Fairtrade standards which are set by the international certification body Fairtrade Labelling Organisations International (FLO) ([www.fairtrade.net](http://www.fairtrade.net)) ensuring that producers are returned a fair wage for their goods.

- Products include food, drinks and clothing for retail, catering or wholesale.
- The full range of over 3000 Fair Trade products is available at:  
[www.fairtrade.org.uk/products/default.aspx](http://www.fairtrade.org.uk/products/default.aspx)

### **Buyers' Guides**

Buyers' Guides rate different brands of appliances, detergents and other goods according to environmental or ethical criteria to help inform your decision making. They are available online. One such example is the Ethical Consumer's Buyers' Guides, available at:  
[www.ethicalconsumer.org/FreeBuyersGuides.aspx](http://www.ethicalconsumer.org/FreeBuyersGuides.aspx)

### **'Green' Services**

The variety of 'green' purchasing options available on the market extends beyond material products. Companies are now offering (for example) 'greener' car insurance, accountancy, and cleaning services.

Look for an explanation on how companies are achieving their 'green' status, and what they have/intend to accomplish before you decide whether you want to buy into their service.

## **Purchasing to minimise waste (Reduce, Reuse, Recycle)**

### **Reduce waste production: Avoid over-ordering**

A central purchasing system can minimise the risk of over-ordering, helping you to save money as well as avoid creating excess waste.

### **Reduce waste production: Bulk orders**

Bulk ordering can not only reduce the cost of your goods, but will also reduce delivery frequency, which, in turn, reduces the emissions produced by the delivery vehicles supplying you. Bulk ordering will also reduce the amount of packaging associated with your delivery.

### **Purchase Reusable Products**

Purchasing refillable or reusable products will help to reduce the amount of waste your company generates. For example, use refillable ink cartridges, pens, pencils, and rechargeable batteries, all widely available for purchase.

### **Purchase items with Recycled Content**

By purchasing recycled products you can reduce your company's consumption of raw materials. The higher the recycled content of the product, the lower your corresponding environmental impact. A wide range of recycled products now exists (e.g. pens, mousemats, fabrics, carpets), and can be bought from many companies at competitive prices.

### **The Green Consumer Guide**

([www.greenconsumerguide.com/domesticll.php?CLASSIFICATION=95&PARENT=92](http://www.greenconsumerguide.com/domesticll.php?CLASSIFICATION=95&PARENT=92)) and Sustainable Product Directory ([www.greenprocurementcodedirectory.co.uk/product/product\\_directory.asp](http://www.greenprocurementcodedirectory.co.uk/product/product_directory.asp)) can provide links to some of these companies.

Many office supply companies will also stock recycled products or sustainable product options. Be sure to ask for these when purchasing.

Dry cleaning companies can benefit from joining the 'Becohangers' scheme for free, to obtain fully recyclable and biodegradable hangers made from recycled paper and card. These will allow your company to reduce environmental impact and save on the cost of purchasing wire hangers. For more information please visit: [www.wannabeco.com](http://www.wannabeco.com).

## **Local sourcing**

By sourcing products locally, you can reduce the environmental costs associated with long distance transport of equivalent products. Popular awareness of 'Food miles', the distance and emissions associated with transporting food products worldwide, is a good example of this. Local sourcing also benefits local communities, by supporting companies that produce and distribute products in ways that positively affect them.

### **Food sourcing**

The Soil Association ([www.whyorganic.org/web/sa/psweb.nsf/A4/index.html](http://www.whyorganic.org/web/sa/psweb.nsf/A4/index.html)) has a number of links to local food networks countrywide. Two of those listed for the London area are:

- London Food Link ([www.sustainweb.org/londonfoodlink/](http://www.sustainweb.org/londonfoodlink/)):
  - The website has a 'Local Food finder' that can help you to source any foodstuff through sustainable local networks, from the office biscuits to full catering supplies.
- London Farmers' Markets ([www.lfm.org.uk/](http://www.lfm.org.uk/)):
  - Use to locate the nearest market that sells produce from local farmers.

### **Always remember to ask**

- Is the purchase of the product necessary?
- Is the product recyclable?
- Is the resource readily renewable?
- Does the product carry a recognised environmental label?
- Is the product energy efficient?
- Does the manufacturing process cause unnecessary pollution?
- Is the packaging wasteful/excessive?

For more information on sustainable purchasing action, or to sign up to London's Green Procurement Code for further support and advice, visit the Mayor of London's Green Procurement Code:

[www.greenprocurementcode.co.uk/](http://www.greenprocurementcode.co.uk/)