

COUNTY OF SAN DIEGO, CALIFORNIA BOARD OF SUPERVISORS POLICY

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Purpose

To evaluate and procure durable and consumable goods that reinforce environmental stewardship, support human health and well-being, contribute to economic growth, reduce Greenhouse Gas emissions, and advance Social Sustainability throughout the region and beyond. Since every product has trade-offs, this policy is not exhaustive but strives to prioritize frequently purchased products.

Background

Every product has inherent social, human health, environmental, and economic impacts. This can occur in one or more stages of a product's Life Cycle, such as ingredient sourcing, manufacturing, transport, use, and disposal. In addition, low-income communities and communities of color often bear a disproportionate burden of pollution and associated health risks based on legacy decisions that place industrial or polluting processes next to these communities. By understanding and taking responsibility for the full Life Cycle impacts and costs associated with County purchases, the County can lead by example in minimizing environmental impact, reducing exposure to harmful products, practicing fiscal Sustainability, and demonstrating Environmental Justice and Social Sustainability.

This policy applies to all County departments and employees, vendors, contractors, and grantees for all products provided to the County. Nothing in this policy shall be construed as requiring the procurement of products that do not perform adequately for their intended use, exclude adequate competition, or are not available at a reasonable price or in a reasonable period of time. The policy shall not supersede state and federal requirements.

It is the intent of this policy that the County will make a good faith effort to promote Sustainability factors to the maximum extent feasible.

Guiding themes

Environmental stewardship

- Protect biodiversity by avoiding products that contribute to deforestation, pollution, and other environmental impacts related to air, water, and land.
- Reduce Greenhouse Gas emissions associated with a product's operation.

Health, safety, and well-being

- Support community and individual health by favoring products that contribute to clean air, clean water, and sustainable living conditions.
- Choose products with reduced Hazardous substances in both their manufacture and maintenance.

Equity and inclusion

- Procure products from underrepresented groups and businesses.

Economic responsibility

- Select products that offer long-term environmental and financial benefits and/or require less maintenance, which can offset potential higher upfront costs.

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- Focus on procurement that supports local economic growth, innovation, and the development of industries committed to Sustainability.

Supplier responsibility

- Evaluate and favor product suppliers and distributors based on their environmental performance and commitments, safe and fair labor practices, and Equity efforts.

Life Cycle considerations

- Consider the Life Cycle of the product when determining types of products to purchase. This would also include consideration of a product's Embodied Carbon.

Alignment with other County efforts and policies

Guiding themes	County plan and/or policy alignment
Environmental stewardship	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Climate Action Plan • Regional Decarbonization Framework • Board Policy G-015 Design Standards for County Facilities and Property • Strategic Plan to Reduce Waste • Solid Waste Ordinance (Title 6, Division 8, Chapter 5) • Senate Bill 1383 • Department Sustainability Commitments • Environmentally Preferred Procurement Policy (EP3) Implementation Guidance- Recovered Organic Waste Products, P-204 • Sustainable Land Use Framework
Health, safety, and well-being	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Department of Environmental Health and Quality – Occupational Health Program • Live Well San Diego – Meet Well Pledge • Employee Wellness Program
Equity and inclusion	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Equity and Racial Justice Administrative Policy 0010-17 – Section 3e. • Equity in Contracting efforts • Board Policy B-53 Small-Local Business Policy (SLBP)
Economic responsibility	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Board Policy A-71 San Diego County Economic Development • Office of Economic Development and Government Affairs • Expanding Opportunities For Local Businesses To Participate In County Contracts
Supplier responsibility	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Board Policy B-74 Contracting Standards for Janitorial, Landscaping, and Security Services Contracts • Office of Labor Standards and Enforcement

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Life Cycle considerations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Climate Action Plan • Regional Decarbonization Framework • Board Policy B-75 County of San Diego Sustainable, Equitable, and Local Food Sourcing Policy • Board Policy A-94 Disposal of Personal Property
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Definitions

Biodegradable: A material or product that can be decomposed by living organisms, but it may not break down within a specific time frame and may leave behind residues. All Compostable materials are biodegradable, but not all biodegradable materials are Compostable.

BPA (Bisphenol A): A chemical produced for use primarily in the production of polycarbonate plastics and epoxy resins. BPA is a chemical in the class of Bisphenols that have demonstrated negative human and environmental effects including endocrine disruption (see Chemicals of Concern), reproductive issues, and development issues. Bisphenol A is often substituted with other chemicals in the same class. BPA is commonly found in plastic food storage containers, thermal receipts, water bottles, and the lining of metal food cans.

Chemical of Concern: A substance that has the potential to be harmful to human health or the environment and can be identified by their Hazardous properties, such as:

- a. Carcinogenicity: The ability to cause cancer
- b. Mutagenicity: The ability to cause genetic damage
- c. Toxicity to reproduction: The ability to cause reproductive harm
- d. Endocrine disruption: The ability to interfere with the hormone system
- e. Persistence: The ability to remain in the environment
- f. Bioaccumulation: The ability to increase in concentration in organisms over time

Circular Economy: A system where materials are not discarded, nature is regenerated, and growth is gradually decoupled from the consumption of finite resources. Products and materials are kept in circulation through processes like maintenance, repair, reuse, refurbishment, Remanufacture, recycling, and composting. This system is an alternative to the traditional linear economy that extracts raw materials, manufactures them into products, and then disposes of them as trash.

Compostable: A material or product that can break down into non-toxic, natural elements within a consistent time frame and under specific conditions and will not release harmful residues. All Compostable materials are Biodegradable, but not all Biodegradable materials are Compostable.

Dioxins: A group of highly toxic chemicals that are persistent in the environment and can cause various health problems including cancer, reproductive and developmental problems, hormonal interference,

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and immune system damage. They are primarily produced as byproducts of industrial processes like waste incineration, chemical manufacturing, and burning fuels. They can also be released during natural events like forest fires and volcanic eruptions.

Elemental Chlorine Free (ECF): A technique that uses chlorine dioxide, a chlorine derivative, instead of elemental chlorine gas. It reduces the risk of dioxin formation as opposed to traditional chlorine gas bleaching and is used for the bleaching of wood pulp in paper products. See also, Processed Chlorine Free (PCF).

Embodied Carbon: The sum impact of all Greenhouse Gas emissions attributed to a material or product throughout its Life Cycle.

Environmental Justice: Shall have the same meaning as set forth in [California Government Code Section 65040.12](#) or successor statute.

Environmentally Preferable Product (EPP): A material or product that has a lesser negative impact on human health and the environment, when compared to competing products that serve the same purpose.

Hazardous: A material containing toxic substances that can cause harm to humans and/or the environment.

HDPE (High-density polyethylene): A plastic commonly used in consumer products that has the number "2" as its resin identification code. It is found in many containers such as milk jugs, shampoo and soap bottles, detergents, and bleaches.

Greenhouse Gas (GHG): A gas in the Earth's atmosphere that traps heat and contributes to global warming and climate change, including carbon dioxide, methane, nitrous oxide, hydrofluorocarbons, perfluorocarbons, and sulfur hexafluoride.

Life Cycle: The consecutive and interlinked stages of a goods or services system, from raw material extraction through manufacturing and processing, transportation, use, and disposal.

PET (Polyethylene Terephthalate): An easily recyclable plastic commonly used in consumer products that has the number "1" as its resin identification code. It is found in most water and soda bottles, and some packaging. It is intended for single use applications; repeated use increases the risk of leaching and bacterial growth.

PFAS (Per- and Polyfluoroalkyl Substances): A group of human-made toxic chemicals that are resistant to heat, water, and oil. Often referred to as "forever chemicals", PFAS are persistent and do not break down easily in the environment. They can accumulate in the blood and organs over time and have been linked to serious health effects in animals and humans, including immune system suppressions, developmental issues, and increased risk of cancer. PFAS are used in many products

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including waterproof clothing, upholstery, food paper wrappings, non-stick cookware, and personal care products.

Phthalates: A series of widely used chemicals that are primarily used as plasticizers to make plastics softer and more flexible. They can be found in most products that have contact with plastics during production, packaging, or delivery. Phthalates also function as solvents and stabilizers in perfumes and other fragrance preparations. Phthalates demonstrate to be endocrine disruptors and detrimental to human health.

Polystyrene: A polymer of styrene used in containers, packaging, and expanded polystyrene (commonly known as Styrofoam). Exposure can result in mucous membrane and eye irritation, gastrointestinal effects, effects on the central nervous system and hearing loss, and also may have linkages to certain cancers.

Post-Consumer: A material or product that has been diverted from disposal to landfill following receipt and/or use to become feedstock for another product, in whole or in part.

Processed Chlorine Free (PCF): Refers to Recycled content paper that may have originally been chlorine bleached, is not re-bleached with chlorine compounds in the manufacturing of the new paper. See also, Elemental Chlorine Free (ECF).

PVC (Polyvinyl Chloride): A toxic plastic commonly used in pipes, electrical cables, construction, and food packaging. It has the number "3" as its resin identification code. Exposure to PVC has linkages to a range of health problems, including cancer, liver damage, hormone disruption, weakened immune systems, and respiratory issues. Production of PVC and end of life processes also releases Dioxins and other hazardous air pollutants. Flexible PVC is commonly referred to as vinyl.

Reclaim: A material or product of some value that is obtained from the disassembly of a Post-Consumer product and/or the deconstruction of buildings or structures. Reclaimed items are reused without being significantly altered in form, contrary to recycled items.

Recyclable: A material or product that can economically be diverted from the solid waste stream and be used as feedstock in the manufacturing of another product.

Repairable: A product that, if broken or damaged, can be put back into good condition or made to work again.

Remanufacture: A product that has been restored to a like-new condition through a process that involves replacing broken and/or worn parts, cleaning, and reassembling. The result is a product that meets or exceeds the original manufacturer's specifications.

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Reusable: A material or product that can be used several times for an intended purpose before reaching end-of-life, such as a durable food or beverage container or toner cartridges that can be refilled.

Social Sustainability: “Identifying and managing business impacts, both positive and negative, on people. The quality of a company’s relationships and engagement with its stakeholders is critical. Directly or indirectly, companies affect what happens to employees, workers in the value chain, customers and local communities, and it is important to manage impacts proactively” or successor definitions as set forth by [United Nations Global Compact](#).

Sustainability: “Meeting the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs” or successor definition as set forth by the [United Nations Brundtland Commission](#). Includes environmental, social, health, and economic elements.

Volatile Organic Compound (VOC): A carbon chemical compound whose composition makes it possible to evaporate under normal indoor atmospheric conditions of temperature and pressure, and is released into the air from products containing them. These can cause human health impacts ranging from short-term eye and nose irritation to long-term kidney and liver damage. VOCs can also worsen symptoms for people with asthma and chronic obstructive pulmonary disease.

Policy

It is the policy of the Board of Supervisors that applicable parties shall prioritize, as feasible:

1. General guidance for products

- 1.1. Previously owned and Remanufactured products instead of purchasing new products whenever feasible. Check the County’s Reutilization website Tier One (1) to procure items available from other County departments prior to buying new.
- 1.2. Reusable, refillable, and Repairable products, in alignment with the Circular Economy model. When these are not available, procure readily Recyclable and/or Compostable products, including packaging and shipping materials.
- 1.3. Energy efficient products, such as ENERGY STAR certified products.
- 1.4. Products without intentionally added VOCs, Hazardous substances, and Chemicals of Concern in manufacture, installation, and maintenance.
- 1.5. Products based on their long-term value and appropriate durability, including costs relating to maintenance, use-based resource consumption, and end-of-life.
- 1.6. Periodic reviews to analyze product consumption and determine if the department or agency should take additional actions to further reduce purchases of commonly used products.

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2. General guidance for evaluating a vendor during procurement

2.1. Vendors that:

- 2.1.1. Demonstrate, measure, and are transparent about a company's environmental and social impact, including fair and equitable labor standards and carbon footprints, such as B-Corporations and those with Fair Labor Association Accreditations.
- 2.1.2. Hold relevant third-party sustainability certification(s), as identified in this policy or as referenced in policy guidance documents. If a product has not been certified by an approved third party as identified in Product Category Specific Requirements (Section 3), other verification/documentation from the vendor certifying that their product meets General Guidance and Product Category Specific Guidance may be acceptable.
- 2.1.3. Use environmentally conscious production and packaging practices, especially those that offer consolidated shipments, reusable packaging, reduced toxicity in packaging, and takeback programs for reuse of the packaging.
- 2.1.4. Minimize transportation emissions through the proximity of products and/or supply chain to San Diego County.

3. Product category specific guidance

3.1. Construction and building materials

- 3.1.1. Reclaimed, Remanufactured, and regionally sourced materials and products. In addition, Recycled, Forest Stewardship Council® (FSC) 100% Recycled, or Mix certified, and/or excluding any tropical or old growth wood for products with wood content.
- 3.1.2. Paint and coatings
 - 3.1.2.1. Interior and exterior paint, primers, stains, sealants, and clear coatings such as shellac and varnish that:
 - 3.1.2.1.1. Are zero- or low-VOC.
 - 3.1.2.1.2. Do not contain intentionally added antibacterials; antifungals are acceptable.
 - 3.1.2.2. Priority certification(s): Cradle to Cradle Certified™ (C2CC) Silver or higher under version 3.1 or newer; Green Seal® (GS-11 Ed. 4.0 Standard or newer); Green Wise Gold; Master Painters Institute (MPI) Approved X-Green™; or as referenced in policy guidance documents.
 - 3.1.2.3. Acceptable certification(s): Compliant Health Product Declaration (HPD) with content characterized, screened, and inventoried to at least 1,000 parts

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per million (ppm) under version 2.0 or newer; or as referenced in policy guidance documents.

3.2. Food service ware

3.2.1. Cups (hot/cold), bowls, and plates

3.2.1.1. Preferred: Reusable stainless steel, ceramic, or glass.

3.2.1.1.1. Priority certification(s): GreenScreen Certified® for Reusable Food Packaging, Service Ware, & Cookware, Silver or higher; or as referenced in policy guidance documents.

3.2.1.2. Recommended: Backyard Compostable; HDPE reusable and dishwasher-safe; with no intentionally added PFAS, BPA, Phthalates, and Polystyrene.

3.2.1.2.1. Priority certification(s): DIN Tested - Garden Compostable; GreenScreen Certified® for Reusable Food Packaging, Service Ware, & Cookware, Silver or higher; OK compost HOME; UL Ecologo® UL 3420 Plastic Packaging and Packaging Components, Silver or higher; or as referenced in policy guidance documents.

3.2.1.2.2. Avoid Biodegradable and commercially Compostable products.

3.2.1.3. Adequate: PET Recyclable food service ware with no intentionally added PFAS or other Chemicals of Concern.

3.2.1.3.1. Priority certification(s): GreenScreen Certified® Standard for Single-Use Food Service Ware & Thermal Paper, Silver or higher; Nordic Swan Ecolabel for Disposables for Food; or as referenced in policy guidance documents.

3.2.2. Cutlery

3.2.2.1. Preferred: Reusable stainless steel.

3.2.2.1.1. Priority certification(s): GreenScreen Certified® for Reusable Food Packaging, Service Ware, & Cookware, Silver or higher; or as referenced in policy guidance documents.

3.2.2.2. Recommended: Backyard Compostable; HDPE reusable and dishwasher-safe; with no intentionally added PFAS, BPA, Phthalates, and Polystyrene.

3.2.2.2.1. Priority certification(s): DIN Tested - Garden Compostable; GreenScreen Certified® for Reusable Food Packaging, Service Ware, & Cookware, Silver or higher; OK compost HOME; UL

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Ecologo® UL 3420 Plastic Packaging and Packaging Components,
Silver or higher; or as referenced in policy guidance documents.

- 3.2.2.2.2. Avoid Biodegradable and commercially Compostable products.
- 3.2.2.3. Avoid single use utensils even if marketed as Recyclable. Utensils are not Recyclable at facilities in San Diego County due to their small size.

3.3. Furniture – Seating, office furniture, and systems furniture¹

- 3.3.1. Furniture made from sustainably harvested and/or recycled content materials.
- 3.3.1.1. Priority certification(s): C2CC Bronze or higher under version 4.0 or newer; Forest Stewardship Council® (FSC) 100% Recycled, or Mix; SCS Recycled Content Certification; or as referenced in policy guidance documents.
- 3.3.1.2. Acceptable certification(s): BIFMA Level 3 or higher under version e3-2019; BIFMA Level 2 or higher under version e3-2024 or newer; Green Circle Certified® (Recycled Content); GreenScreen Certified® Standard for Furniture & Fabrics; or as referenced in policy guidance documents.
- 3.3.2. Avoiding furniture with intentionally added antimicrobials, anti-odor treatments, flame retardant chemicals, PFAS, formaldehyde, and PVC.
- 3.3.2.1. Priority certification(s): BIFMA Level 3 or higher under version e3-2019, or BIFMA Level 2 or higher under version e3-2024 or newer, meeting criterion 7.4.4, “Targeted Chemical Elimination”; Greenhealth Approved; GreenScreen Certified® Standard for Furniture & Fabrics; or as referenced in policy guidance documents.
- 3.3.2.2. Acceptable certification(s): Compliant Health Product Declaration (HPD) with content characterized, screened, and inventoried to at least 1,000 parts per million (ppm) under version 2.0 or newer; or as referenced in policy guidance documents.
- 3.3.3. Furniture that is zero- or low-VOC emissions.
- 3.3.3.1. Priority certification(s): C2CC Bronze or higher under version 4.0 or newer; GREENGUARD Gold; GreenScreen Certified® Standard for Furniture & Fabrics; SCS Indoor Advantage Gold Certification; or as referenced in policy guidance documents.
- 3.3.4. **Upholstery**

¹ Furniture is typically composed of multiple components of materials such that there are various considerations for human health and environmental impact. Therefore, the following considerations are not listed as either/or.

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3.3.4.1. Upholstery made with natural fibers such as organic cotton, linen, bamboo, or hemp; recycled fabrics; natural rubber foam/latex; or bio-based materials such as plant-based leathers.

3.3.4.1.1. Priority certification(s): Global Organic Textile Standard (GOTS); OEKO-TEX® ORGANIC COTTON; or as referenced in policy guidance documents.

3.3.4.2. Avoiding upholstery made with conventionally grown cotton or with virgin synthetic or semi-synthetic fabrics including polyester, rayon, acrylic, polyurethane foam, or PVC such as faux leather.

3.3.4.3. Priority certification(s): GreenScreen Certified® Standard for Furniture & Fabrics; NSF/ANSI Standard 336 Gold or higher; OEKO-TEX® Standard 100 certification; or as referenced in policy guidance documents.

3.4. Office supplies

3.4.1. Reducing paper and/or toner use by:

3.4.1.1. Printing only when absolutely needed and relying instead on digital files rather than hard-copy printed documents;

3.4.1.2. Printing double-sided documents;

3.4.1.3. Taking notes electronically; and

3.4.1.4. Collecting for reuse any single-sided printed standard size paper (provided the printed side does not contain any confidential or sensitive information).

3.4.2. Toner ink and cartridges

3.4.2.1. High yield cartridges.

3.4.2.2. Plant-based ink.

3.4.2.2.1. Priority certification(s): USDA Certified Biobased Product.

3.4.2.3. Minimize Chemicals of Concern.

3.4.2.3.1. Priority certification(s): Blue Angel DE-UZ 237; UL Ecologo® UL 2801 Printing Inks; or as referenced in policy guidance documents.

3.4.2.4. Remanufactured toner cartridges.

3.4.2.4.1. Priority certification(s): Blue Angel DE-UZ 177; EPA Comprehensive Procurement Guidelines (CPG) Toner Cartridges; or as referenced in policy guidance documents.

3.4.3. Paper

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- 3.4.3.1. Paper that is:
 - 3.4.3.1.1. No less than 30% post-consumer recycled fiber in copy and printing paper.
 - 3.4.3.1.2. Meeting [Senate Bill 1383 requirements](#), including but not limited to meeting Post-Consumer recycled fiber content for covered paper products.
 - 3.4.3.1.3. Sourced from sustainably managed forests and/or use renewable resources like responsibly-grown and harvested bamboo when using virgin content.
 - 3.4.3.1.4. Elemental or Processed Chlorine Free.
- 3.4.3.2. Priority certification(s): Forest Stewardship Council® (FSC) Recycled or Mix; Green Seal® (GS-7 Ed. 4.0 Standard or newer); SCS Recycled Content Certification; or as referenced in policy guidance documents.
- 3.4.3.3. Photocopiers, fax machines, printers, and other printing and copying equipment that are compatible with the use of recycled-content paper products and have the capability to print and copy double-sided.

Policy Monitoring

OSEJ and DPC will be the two lead departments responsible for collecting and reviewing data on County purchases by departments, offices, and contractors. Monitoring may include, but is not limited to:

- Data about products procured in alignment with identified EPP attributes and/or associated certifications
- SB 1383 required recordkeeping for Recycled Organics Products and Recycled-Content and Recyclable Paper Products
- Number of staff who completed EPP trainings(s)
- Degree of change in staff awareness and understanding of processes to identify and make EPP purchases
- Number of EPP resources viewed/used based on web analytics

Future and more comprehensive monitoring of the policy implementation progress may expand over time.

Responsible Departments

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1. Office of Sustainability and Environmental Justice
2. Department of Purchasing and Contracting

Sunset Date

This policy will be reviewed for continuance by 12-31-~~2025~~2032.

References

Board Action
 3/17/92 (15)
 4/4/95 (28)
 3/12/2002 (10)
 04/07/09 (7)
 12/15/15 (21)
 11/14/17 (16)
 10/08/24 (16)