

# Sustainable Procurement Guide

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# Why Sustainability in Purchasing is Important

The University of Kansas spends millions of dollars annually on different products to help fulfill its mission. According to the University's sustainability plan completed in 2011, *Building Sustainable Traditions*, "sustainable purchasing considers the life cycle costs (environmental, social, and financial) of a product, taking into account raw materials acquisition, production, manufacturing, packaging, distribution, reuse, operation, maintenance or disposal of the product or service." Every purchase made at the University provides us the opportunity to illustrate our continuing commitment to sustainability.

Purchasing items through the State Use Catalog creates opportunities for disadvantaged individuals and keeps money in Kansas; incorporating other environmental, social, and economic concerns into procurement decisions can help departments of the University understand the total cost of ownership rather than just the initial cost of purchase. Although some products can be purchased inexpensively, if we take into account other impacts- the depletion and degradation of natural resources, the costs of dealing with waste from production and consumption, the impact of poor working conditions and exposure to toxic chemicals on employees, societal costs of inequality, and others- we begin to see that we are paying much more for these products than just the price tag. Though it is true that purchasing *some* sustainable products means a larger initial capital investment, these products may last longer and need fewer repairs, use less energy to function, and have fewer hazardous materials requiring extra disposal costs.

## About This Guide

Many organizations are moving towards purchasing products that are more environmentally, socially, and economically beneficial. But with over 400 "green" product certifications in the market<sup>1</sup> and some companies making misleading claims about sustainability (known as "greenwashing"), it's not always easy to tell which products are actually more sustainable and which just have a green label.

This guide aims to help individuals in their search for authentic claims. It highlights important elements to look for when selecting suppliers and products, and provides a list and explanations of some of the more common third-party certifications and labels. With this information, individuals purchasing products will be able to gain a more complete idea of cost, incorporating long-term quality, environmental attributes, and social concerns into consideration.

This guide is supplementary to the State Use guidelines. Thoughtful purchasing decisions can be complimentary rather than competing with other University interests.

## Before Buying

In addition to purchasing items that are environmentally, socially and economically beneficial, it is important to consider *reducing* the amount of products we consume. The word "procurement" is used in the title instead of "purchasing" as a reminder to consider options other than purchasing to meet your needs. When you find that you are in need of something, start with asking yourself these questions:

1. Is this product absolutely necessary or can we fulfill our need another way?
2. Can we reduce the amount of the product we need?
3. Can it be borrowed, shared or rented from somewhere else, particularly within the university?
4. Can it be purchased second hand?
5. How long will it last?

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<sup>1</sup> Bogdan, Lea. "ECO LABELS 101: Green Certifications Explained!" *Inhabitat - Sustainable Design Innovation, Eco Architecture, Green Building*. Inhabitat, 6 Apr. 2010. Web. 05 June 2012. <<http://inhabitat.com/demystifying-eco-labels/>>.

6. Can it be useful to us or others in a different way when it no longer serves its original purpose?

## Considering Suppliers

Many of the products you purchase on a regular basis will come from preferred suppliers working with KU, but you may need to make some purchases from non-preferred suppliers. Keep these questions in mind when selecting other suppliers for products.

## Preserving the Environment

Protecting the environment is often the first thing that comes to mind when people think of sustainability. Here are some questions to consider when selecting a supplier:

1. Do the manufacturers responsibly manage renewable resources and attempt to minimize the amount of non-renewable resources used in their products and manufacturing processes?
2. Are they working to reduce their energy consumption or using renewable energy sources (wind, solar, geothermal, etc.)?
3. Do the manufacturers and suppliers try to minimize waste in processing, warehousing, and shipping and do they encourage consumers to recycle their products and packaging?

## Protecting People

Environmental concerns are often seen as the main focus of sustainability initiatives, but it's important to consider social issues as well. Sustainability means all people must have the opportunity to live happy, healthy lives. Here are some questions to consider when selecting a supplier:

1. Are working conditions safe?
2. Does the company provide opportunities for people from diverse groups (women, minorities, disabled individuals, etc.)?
3. Are employees treated with respect and given a voice in decisions that are made?

## Promoting a Healthy Economy

One of the goals of sustainability is to create healthy economies where people and businesses can flourish. Here are some questions to consider when selecting a supplier:

1. Does the company value long-term growth over short term profit?
2. Does the company invest in our local community or in the communities it resides in?
3. Does the company make an effort to promote sustainability in their supply chain and in their industry?

## *What Does Local Mean?*

Due to the complexity of local, regional, and global economies, there is no universally accepted definition of local when it comes to purchasing products. However, by understanding the value created by supporting local and regional economies and combining that with our knowledge of the resources available in our region, we can make choices that not only have a smaller carbon footprint but also create strong relationships with our own communities.

One of the most common reasons given for favoring purchasing from local suppliers over global suppliers is the reduction in energy used to transport products. This is only one of many reasons to support local businesses, however. Buying from local businesses keeps jobs in the community, decreases reliance on distant and foreign suppliers, and keeps money circulating in the local economy rather than flowing to corporate headquarters. A series of five studies done by Civic Economics between 2002 and 2009 found that purchases made from local businesses recirculated significantly greater amounts of money into the local economy. Purchases made at the local establishments returned between 13 and 32 percent more revenue to their communities than large chain or

big-box stores did.<sup>2</sup> These differences were caused by two factors: local companies employ more people within the community, so the wages they are paid are more likely to be spent locally, and independent businesses purchase more from smaller suppliers in their own communities than large national chains.

These are questions to ask when selecting a supplier. A business independently owned by someone in the community will bring the most benefit to the local economy, and each successive option provides less benefit.

1. Are any of the potential suppliers independently owned by someone in the community (Lawrence or surrounding cities within 60 miles)?
2. Are any of the potential suppliers independently owned by someone in the state?
3. Are any of the potential suppliers a franchise or a chain store with an actual brick and mortar store in the city or state?
4. Do any of the potential suppliers employ local citizens?
5. Do any of the potential suppliers pay taxes to the state of Kansas by having a nexus or through other means?

### **How to Determine if Sustainability Efforts are Authentic**

It can be difficult to know where a company stands on these issues and how legitimate their claims are. Keeping the following things in mind while looking up their sustainability initiatives will make the process much faster and simpler:

1. Organizations truly committed to sustainability are proud of their efforts and want people to know it. The *more information* you can find, and the easier it is to find that information, the more likely that the label's claims are legitimate. In general, the level of *transparency* reflects the level of sincerity that the company has towards sustainability.
2. Be wary of companies that strongly promote one aspect of sustainability while ignoring others. A genuine commitment to sustainability is often illustrated by *comprehensively addressing all of the environmental and social impacts of products*, not just one or two facets of sustainability.
3. *Third-party certification* is critical to ensuring neutrality in certification. If the organization is made up of members from the industry it is certifying, it's more likely that there is some greenwashing going on.
4. Try to find *reviews of the label* from independent, environmental information sources.

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<sup>2</sup> Mitchell, Stacy. "Key Studies on Big-Box Retail & Independent Business." *Independent*. Institute for Local Self-Reliance, 22 Dec. 2011. Retrieved on May, 14 2012 from <http://www.ilsr.org/key-studies-walmart-and-bigbox-retail/>.

## Products, Certifications, and Labels

This section of the guide will take you through different categories of products and explain what attributes to look for and avoid when purchasing items in that category. It will also give you a list of common certifications and labels that indicate that the product is more sustainable than alternatives. Lastly this section will explain how to locate sustainably-produced items through preferred suppliers at KU (if applicable).

### PAPER

Copy paper, notepads, sticky notes, notecards, etc.

<i>What to Look For</i>	<i>What to Avoid</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• High percentage of post-consumer recycled paper</li> <li>• Fiber sourced responsibly from well-managed forests</li> <li>• Minimized use of harmful chemicals (chlorine-free processing)</li> <li>• Safe working conditions in the harvesting and manufacturing processes</li> <li>• Respect for the rights of affected communities and indigenous people</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Use of uncertified virgin wood</li> <li>• Chlorine used in processing</li> <li>• SFI Certification (see below)</li> <li>• Coated papers that are hard to recycle if possible</li> </ul>

### Certifications and Labels

#### Chlorine Free



The Chlorine Free Products Association is a non-profit that certifies that products are processed chlorine free or totally chlorine free.

#### Forest Stewardship Council



Includes at least 85% post-consumer recycled fiber.

Made of a combination of FSC-certified virgin fiber mixed with controlled virgin fiber and/or recycled fiber.

Made of 100% FSC-certified virgin fiber.

A non-profit third-party certifier that evaluates products based on the following ten principles to ensure that they come from well managed forests and provide environmental, social and economic benefits.

1. Compliance with laws and FSC principles
2. Tenure and use rights and responsibilities legally established
3. Indigenous peoples' rights recognized and respected
4. Community relations and workers' rights maintained or enhanced
5. Efficient use of the forest to ensure economic viability and benefits
6. Maintenance of ecosystem, its biodiversity, resources and landscapes
7. Written management plan
8. Monitoring and assessment of progress towards management plan
9. Maintenance of high conservation value forests
10. Plantations managed to promote the conservation of natural forests

#### Rainforest Alliance Certified



The Rainforest Alliance is an independent, nonprofit organization that ensures that a product comes from a farm or forest operation that meets comprehensive standards that protect the environment and promote the rights and well-being of workers, their families and communities. The Rainforest Alliance can certify FSC products, and also has several additional certification and verification programs in forestry, agriculture, and tourism that are un-related to the FSC.

## Recycled



Indicates the product is made from post-industrial (leftover material from factory processes) or post-consumer material. Look for post-consumer material, as it diverts more waste from landfills.

### *A note about the Sustainable Forestry Initiative (SFI):*



The American Forest and Paper Association (AF&PA), the main trade association representing the wood products industry, created the SFI certification program in 1995. SFI is a non-profit, third-party certifier like FSC, though many consider the SFI standards vague and less stringent.

A 2008 Yale research study found the FSC standards to be far more prescriptive than any other certification standards. The SFI standards do not take social considerations into account.<sup>3</sup> Additionally, SFI is not LEED certified unlike the FSC; conservation groups like FERN, the Sierra Club and Forest Ethics claim that the FSC “remains by far the most independent, rigorous, and therefore credible certification of sustainable forestry.”<sup>4</sup>

## ***Buying Paper on KUPPS:***



Staples is the preferred supplier for office related purchases. There are two ways to find sustainably made paper products from Staples on KUPPS. The first is to select “eco-conscious,” “recycled,” and/or the “minority-owned” or “women-owned” business enterprise at the beginning of your search. At that point you can further sort items for specific products. The second way is by selecting the product category first and then selecting one or more of the four indicators above. The eco-conscious option identifies products with a range of certifications. Staples uses these logos to indicate minority-owned  and women-owned  business enterprises.

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<sup>3</sup> Atlee, Jennifer, and Tristan Roberts. "Behind the Logos: Understanding Green Product Certifications." *BuildingGreen Inc.* Environmental Building News, 1 Jan. 2008. Retrieved May 14, 2012 from <http://www.buildinggreen.com/auth/article.cfm/2008/1/1/Behind-the-Logos-Understanding-Green-Product-Certifications/>.

<sup>4</sup> Temple, Nicola. "What's Behind The Sustainable Forestry Initiative Label?" *EcoVillageGreen*. 12 Feb. 2012. Web. Retrieved May 18, 2012 from <http://ecovillagegreen.com/4852/whats-behind-the-sustainable-forestry-initiative-label/>.

## WRITING TOOLS

Pens, pencils, markers, dry-erase markers, etc.

<i>What to Look For</i>	<i>What to Avoid</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• High percentage of post-consumer recycled plastic or other materials</li> <li>• Minimized use of harmful chemicals</li> <li>• Safe working conditions in all steps of the harvesting and manufacturing process</li> <li>• Biodegradable or recyclable</li> <li>• Water or alcohol-based inks</li> <li>• Refillable or reloadable tools</li> <li>• Minimal packaging, ideally made of recyclable or biodegradable materials</li> <li>• Items packaged in bulk</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Use of only virgin materials</li> <li>• Single-use writing tools</li> <li>• Solvent or ketone-based inks</li> <li>• Unnecessary packaging made of non-recyclable materials</li> <li>• Items packaged individually</li> </ul>

## Certifications and Labels

### Ecologo



The Ecologo program develops rigorous criteria addressing multiple environmental attributes throughout the entire life cycle of a product or service and awards the EcoLogo to those that are verified by an independent third party as complying with the criteria.

### Forest Stewardship Council



A non-profit third-party certifier that evaluates products based on ten principles to ensure that they come from well managed forests and provide environmental, social and economic benefits. (See Paper Purchasing for a list of the ten principles.)

### Recycled



Indicates the product is made from post-industrial (leftover material from factory processes) or post-consumer material. Look for post-consumer material, as it diverts more waste from landfills.

## Buying Writing Tools on KUPPS



Staples is the preferred supplier for office related purchases. There are two ways to find sustainably made writing tools from Staples on KUPPS. The first is to select “eco-conscious,” “recycled,” and/or the “minority-owned” or “women-owned” business enterprise at the beginning of your search. At that point you can further sort items for specific products. The second way is by selecting the product category first and then selecting one or more of the four indicators above. The eco-conscious option identifies products with a range of certifications. Staples uses logos to indicate minority-owned  and women-owned  business enterprises.

## OFFICE SUPPLIES

Tape, scissors, paper clips, staplers, hole punchers, binders, file folders, supply organizers, etc.

<i>What to Look For</i>	<i>What to Avoid</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• High percentage of post-consumer recycled materials</li> <li>• Minimized use of harmful chemicals</li> <li>• Safe working conditions in all steps of the manufacturing process</li> <li>• Biodegradable or recyclable</li> <li>• Refillable or reloadable tools</li> <li>• Minimal packaging, ideally made of recyclable or biodegradable materials</li> <li>• Items packaged in bulk (if applicable)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Use of only virgin materials</li> <li>• Single-use/disposable office supplies</li> <li>• Unnecessary packaging made of non-recyclable materials</li> <li>• Items packaged individually</li> </ul>

### *Certifications and Labels*

#### **Ecologo**



The Ecologo program develops rigorous criteria addressing multiple environmental attributes throughout the entire life cycle of a product or service and awards the EcoLogo to those that are verified by an independent third party as complying with the criteria.

#### **Forest Stewardship Council**



A non-profit third-party certifier that evaluates products based on ten principles to ensure that they come from well managed forests and provide environmental, social and economic benefits. (See Paper Purchasing for a list of the ten principles.)

#### **Recycled**



Indicates the product is made from post-industrial (leftover material from factory processes) or post-consumer material. Look for post-consumer material, as it diverts more waste from landfills.

### *Buying Office Supplies on KUPPS*



Staples is the preferred supplier for office related purchases. There are two ways to find sustainably made office supplies from Staples on KUPPS. The first is to select “eco-conscious,” “recycled,” and/or the “minority-owned” or “women-owned” business enterprise at the beginning of your search. At that point you can further sort items for specific products. The second way is by selecting the product category first and then selecting one or more of the four indicators above. The eco-conscious option identifies products with a range of certifications. Staples uses these logos to indicate minority-owned  and women-owned  business enterprises.

## FURNITURE

Chairs, desks, bookcases, tables, etc.

*\*A note about purchasing furniture:* before looking for furniture to buy, contact the KU Surplus Program to see if they have something that can fulfill your need.

<i>What to Look For</i>	<i>What to Avoid</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• High percentage of post-consumer recycled materials (wood, plastic, metals, etc.)</li> <li>• Minimized use of harmful chemicals</li> <li>• Safe working conditions in all steps of the manufacturing process</li> <li>• Minimal packaging, ideally made of recyclable or biodegradable materials</li> <li>• Recyclable at the end of the useful life</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Use of only virgin materials</li> <li>• Furniture made with toxic and harmful chemicals</li> <li>• Unnecessary packaging made of non-recyclable materials</li> </ul>

### *Certifications and Labels*

#### **Cradle to Cradle®**



The Cradle to Cradle Certified program is a third party, multi-attribute eco-label that assesses a product's safety to humans and the environment and design for future life cycles.

#### **Ecologo®**



The Ecologo program develops rigorous criteria addressing multiple environmental attributes throughout the entire life cycle of a product or service and awards the EcoLogo to those that are verified by an independent third party as complying with the criteria.

#### **Forest Stewardship Council®**



A non-profit third-party certifier that evaluates products based on ten principles to ensure that they come from well managed forests and provide environmental, social and economic benefits. (See Paper Purchasing for a list of the ten principles.)

#### **GREENGUARD**



The GREENGUARD Indoor Air Quality Certification Program certifies products designed for use in office environments and other indoor spaces meet strict chemical emissions limits, which contribute to the creation of healthier interiors.

#### **level®**



A third-party certification program for the furniture industry that takes into account a company's social actions, energy usage, material selection and human and ecosystem health impacts.

## Recycled



Indicates the product is made from post-industrial (leftover material from factory processes) or post-consumer material. Look for post-consumer material, as it diverts more waste from landfills.

## SMaRT Certified



SMaRT Certified products are rated based on their life cycle and supply chain performance using criteria in the areas of Health, Environment, Social Equity and Reclamation.

## ELECTRONICS

Computers, printers, multifunction devices, speakers, etc.

<i>What to Look For</i>	<i>What to Avoid</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Minimized use of harmful chemicals</li> <li>• Safe working conditions in all steps of the harvesting and manufacturing processes</li> <li>• Built-in power saving settings</li> <li>• Minimal packaging, ideally made of recyclable or biodegradable materials</li> <li>• Bulk packaging if ordering multiple items</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Use of only virgin materials</li> <li>• Unnecessary packaging made of non-recyclable materials</li> <li>• Items packaged individually</li> </ul>

### *Certifications and Labels*

#### **Ecologo**



The Ecologo program develops rigorous criteria addressing multiple environmental attributes throughout the entire life cycle of a product or service and awards the EcoLogo to those that are verified by an independent third party as complying with the criteria.

#### **Energy Star**



The Energy Star symbol was designed by the US Environmental Protection Agency and certifies that products are energy efficient for their product category and perform as well as if not better than their counterparts.

#### **EPEAT**



The Electronic Product Environmental Assessment Tool measures the environmental performance of electronics products and ranks them bronze, silver or gold based on compliance with standards.

#### **GREENGUARD**



The GREENGUARD Indoor Air Quality Certification Program certifies products designed for use in office environments and other indoor spaces meet strict chemical emissions limits, which contribute to the creation of healthier interiors.

## *Buying Electronics on KUPPS*



(Desktop and Laptop PCs)

Dell currently does not have a filter to find products made sustainably. To find out what certifications a product has, you must first select the product. Find the “Tech Specs” section and look under “Regulatory and Environmental Compliance” for certifications.



(Computer Accessories and Hardware)

CDW-G does not have a way to filter products that are sustainably made, but it is easy to see if a product is certified as soon as it is selected. On items that have Energy Star or EPEAT certification, there is a box written in green near the top of the page that indicates what certifications it has. If there is no box, it’s not an environmentally preferable product. Any box is a good sign, but the higher the version of Energy Star the better, and EPEAT Gold is the best.



(Small Computer Accessories and Peripherals, Toner Cartridges)

There are two ways to find sustainably made products from Staples on KUPPS. The first is to select “eco-conscious,” “recycled,” and/or the “minority-owned” or “women-owned” business enterprise at the beginning of your search. At that point you can further sort items for specific products. The second way is by selecting the product category first and then selecting one or more of the four indicators above. The eco-conscious option identifies products with a range of certifications. Staples uses these logos to indicate minority-owned  and women-owned  business enterprises.





## BREAK ROOM SUPPLIES

Plates, bowls, napkins, silverware, cups, serving pieces, party decorations, etc.

<i>What to Look For</i>	<i>What to Avoid</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Reusable cups, plates, and silverware</li> <li>• High percentage of post-consumer recycled materials</li> <li>• Recyclable products, especially if for single use</li> <li>• Made from rapidly renewable resources (e.g. bamboo)</li> <li>• Compostable or biodegradable if composting is an option</li> <li>• Safe working conditions in all steps of the manufacturing process</li> <li>• Minimal packaging, ideally made of recyclable or biodegradable materials</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Single-use items (if possible)</li> <li>• Use of only virgin materials</li> <li>• Styrofoam</li> <li>• Unnecessary packaging made of non-recyclable materials</li> <li>• Items packaged individually</li> <li>• Purchasing compostable materials if they are not going to be composted</li> </ul>

## *Certifications and Labels*

### Biodegradable Products Institute



A non-profit that certifies that products will biodegrade completely when composted in the right manner.

### Forest Stewardship Council®



A non-profit third-party certifier that evaluates products based on ten principles to ensure that they come from well managed forests and provide environmental, social and economic benefits. (See Paper Purchasing for a list of the ten principles.)

### Recycled



Indicates the product is made from post-industrial (leftover material from factory processes) or post-consumer material. Look for post-consumer material, as it diverts more waste from landfills.

## Other Resources

- Sins of Greenwashing -- <http://sinsofgreenwashing.org/>
  - List and explanations of the different kinds of greenwashing.
- Inhabitat: Green Certifications Explained -- <http://inhabitat.com/demystifying-eco-labels/>
  - Additional explanations of labels discussed above.
- Ecolabel Index -- <http://www.ecolabelindex.com/ecolabels/>
  - Large collection of most eco-labels on the market, includes information on what attributes the label certifies, and who the managing organization is.

## Resources Consulted

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