

Buying Recycled

Recycled-Content Products (RCPs) deserve another look.

Recycled-Content Products (RCPs) first became available in the early 1970's following the first Earth Day celebration. The few products sold in those days were often crudely designed, using poor materials, with little or no research or testing. The RCPs of today are an entirely new breed of high-tech, high-value, earth-friendly products.

Purchasing RCPs presents a tremendous opportunity. First and foremost, RCPs provide residents and businesses with a quality product capable of meeting any performance specifications and consumer needs. Secondly, you can save money buying recycled content products from the extensive variety available. Additionally, purchasing RCPs is good for the environment by conserving natural resources and energy, and preserving landfill space. Economic development at the local level is also enhanced when consumers and businesses buy RCPs from local manufacturers and suppliers.

The following RCP procurement information is supplied by the Buy Recycled staff of the California Integrated Waste Management Board (CIWMB). For more information, call the Buy Recycled staff at (916) 341-6199.

Dispelling the Myths

Price

Many RCPs are less expensive than comparable non-recycled products. Like any product, price is dependent upon quality, quantity ordered, whether the product is a specialty item or a more common product, etc. Many large corporations such as Mobil, James River, Kelly Moore, Georgia-Pacific, Chevron, and Goodyear are currently selling RCPs. Compare prices and shop around. These large corporations mass-produce their RCPs, which keeps the price per unit low, resulting in very competitive, finished-product pricing.



Quality

Many RCPs are at least as good as non-recycled products. The modern high-technology companies previously mentioned and entrepreneurial companies spend millions of dollars to research materials and test products. RCPs have inherent qualities that result in improved performance characteristics. For example, the fibers of recycled newsprint curl more easily through the printing presses; re-refined oil contains only the strongest molecules; plastic lumber lasts longer and requires less maintenance than comparable wood or concrete products; and recycled printing and writing papers have increased printability and readability.

Availability

With the decrease in price and increase in quality, demand is increasing. Contractors and vendors can easily obtain RCPs, if they are requested to do so. Many RCPs are now as easy to find and obtain as any other product. RCPs are now available through supermarkets, discount, retail and club/membership stores. RCP guides are available from governmental offices, industry associations, and environmental groups.

Increasing Comfort Level

Experiment

Given a chance, RCPs will prove their value. They provide an opportunity to save money and improve the environment. RCP categories that are safe bets for starting out include janitorial paper products, office paper products, recycled latex paint, compost, and re-treaded tires. Choose a product from a manufacturer or a vendor you already trust, and experiment with the most common RCPs to increase your comfort level.

Experience

Take it one step at a time if RCPs are new to you. Stay with what you know best. As your positive experiences grow, try a new product and/or a new vendor. Brainstorm with other interested people. Obtain help from the CIWMB's Buy Recycled staff. You will find yourself gaining the experience necessary to provide assistance to others. Before long you will be making bigger and better RCP purchases from the wide variety of available products.



Network

Share your experiences with others. Some people may have more experience buying RCPs within a specific product category or using a reliable vendor. Learn from those around you and try to avoid the few bad apples. Before long, you will be proclaiming the virtues of buying RCPs for all of your needs.

RCP Sources



Identify Vendors, Product Suppliers, and Stores

You may already be buying RCPs without even knowing it. Ask your vendors or the stores you patronize to determine whether they carry RCPs. For businesses, talk to manufacturers directly to determine the recycled content of products.

You may not need to find new vendors, product suppliers, or stores that carry RCPs. With the rise in demand for RCPs, supply has followed. Ask those you are currently doing business with to substitute RCPs for non-RCPs whenever possible. Tell them you prefer RCPs and that you would like more to be available.

Environmentally Preferable Purchasing Best Practices Manual

The State of California has developed the "Environmentally Preferable Purchasing Best Practices Manual" to help consumers as well as purchasing officials buy environmentally friendly products in such categories as the following: batteries, building maintenance, grounds maintenance, medical supplies, office machines, office supplies, outdoor furnishings, paper products, printing, and vehicles/transportation. This manual stemmed from passage of Assembly Bill 498, which required that the state develop a manual of environmentally preferable purchasing. Each category is then subdivided into sections, and each section begins with an introduction that highlights a commodity's primary environmental and health issues. Other sections then summarize pertinent California and federal legislation, performance features, availability of products, and cost considerations. The remaining sections then cover topics of interest to purchasing and procurement officials such as: product specifications; tips for writing specifications, including sample language; vendors and other sources for products; and stories that highlight individuals and entities that have successfully used environmentally preferable products. The manual is free and may be accessed on-line at: www.green.ca.gov/EPP/Introduction/default.htm.

CIWMB Recycled Content Product Directory

The California Integrated Waste Management Board (CIWMB) maintains a database that provides information on RCPs as well as manufacturers, distributors, reprocessors, mills, and converters that manufacture or supply these products or the recycled materials to make them. Searches may be conducted by product, brand name, company name, or category. The database may be accessed through the Internet at: www.ciwmb.ca.gov/RCP/.

RecycleStore

The CIWMB's RecycleStore is a catalog of RCPs manufactured in the Recycling Market Development Zones. Through this catalog, manufacturers may be contacted directly in order to obtain more information about their products or to purchase them. The RecycleStore can be accessed by visiting: www.ciwmb.ca.gov/RecycleStore/.

Maintaining Records



Track

Once RCPs are identified, record and track your purchases. Keeping records may help you identify the best RCP purchases to make your dollars stretch. It also will be valuable information for procurement policies or ordinances. Other people will be interested in RCP procurement data to help them establish their own buy-recycled programs.

Evaluate

Evaluate your RCP purchases regularly. Keeping accurate records will enable you to make adjustments for the following year to take full advantage of the RCP procurement opportunities and make your budget last longer. If the RCP procurement data is required for any report or summary, you will be better prepared to recommend increased RCP procurement activities.