

# Frequently Asked Questions

## US Department of Energy Sustainable Acquisition Program

November 2010

### GENERAL QUESTIONS

#### Products

**Question:** Is product x designated?

**Response:** The quickest way to identify whether a product is designated is to refer to the Compiled Product tool ([http://www.fedcenter.gov/Documents/index.cfm?id=11767&pge\\_prg\\_id=20257](http://www.fedcenter.gov/Documents/index.cfm?id=11767&pge_prg_id=20257)). Rather than a long list of products, the tool groups products by category: construction, office products, etc.

**Question:** Where can we find designated product x?

**Response:** The best way to find a product with specific attributes is to specify those attributes in all contract actions, task and delivery orders, and purchasing agreements. For items not purchased through those vehicles, a website search specifying the attributes required will typically round up the desired product with specified attributes. The following designated products have websites denoting the manufacturers:

- Biobased (<http://www.catalog.biopreferred.gov/bioPreferredCatalog/faces/jsp/catalogLanding.jsp;jsessionid=E84D3E95CE1A22D67CE7A3FCEF713DF1>)
- ENERGY STAR ([http://www.energystar.gov/index.cfm?c=products.pr\\_find\\_es\\_products](http://www.energystar.gov/index.cfm?c=products.pr_find_es_products))
- EPEAT Electronic Equipment (<http://www.epeat.net>)
- WaterSense (<http://www.epa.gov/watersense/>)

**Question:** Where can we find template language?

**Response:** Template language can be found at:

- DOE contract guidance and language for construction projects and office supplies (<http://www.hss.doe.gov/pp/epp/epspecs.html>).

- DOE template clauses for architecture engineer, construction, janitorial services, computers, and service contracts  
(<http://management.energy.gov/documents/AttachmentFlash2010-39.pdf>)
- U.S. Department of Agriculture template clauses for biobased construction, custodial, food services, grounds, operations, and vehicles  
(<http://www.usda.gov/procurement/programs/biobased/procurementtools.htm>)  
Note: scroll down to "Contract Templates"
- U.S. Environmental Protection Agency broad spectrum of template clauses in use by Federal agencies as well as states and cities  
(<http://yosemite1.epa.gov/oppt/eppstand2.nsf>) Note: many of these are old and may not address recent requirements for biobased content, ENERGY STAR registered, non-offgassing chemicals, etc.

**Question:** How do we determine if product x meets the requirements?

**Response:** To determine if a product has x% of biobased or recycled content, check out the

- Description of product on the web or other marketing material
- Material Safety Data Sheet
- Vendor or manufacturer of the product
- In the case of biobased products, the US Department of Agriculture BioPreferred catalog  
(<http://www.catalog.biopreferred.gov/bioPreferredCatalog/faces/jsp/catalogLaunching.jsp;jsessionid=E84D3E95CE1A22D67CE7A3FCE713DF1>)

For listings of products that meet the following standards, see

- ENERGY STAR  
([http://www.energystar.gov/index.cfm?c=products.pr\\_find\\_es\\_products](http://www.energystar.gov/index.cfm?c=products.pr_find_es_products))
- EPEAT Electronic Equipment (<http://www.epeat.net>)
- WaterSense (<http://www.epa.gov/watersense/>)

**Question:** Do we have to report the purchase of product x?

**Response:** We have to give preference to all designated products, including in a minimum of 95% of new contract actions, task and delivery orders, but we do not have reporting requirements for all of the designated products. For an overview of the reporting requirements, see the DOE Sustainable Acquisition website on "Reporting" (<http://www.hss.doe.gov/pp/epp/reporting.html>).

## **Performance**

**Question:** Where do we find information on the performance of product x?

**Response:** Two main sources of information on product performance are available:

- DOE site experience with biobased products ([http://www.hss.doe.gov/pp/epp/biobased\\_success.html](http://www.hss.doe.gov/pp/epp/biobased_success.html)) and recycled products ([http://www.hss.doe.gov/pp/epp/recycled\\_success.html](http://www.hss.doe.gov/pp/epp/recycled_success.html))
- Ask the vendor or manufacturer for testimonials by users of the product

**Question:** How can we be sure product x will not void the warranty of the equipment it is used in?

**Response:** Warranties cannot preclude the use of a specific type of product, such as those with biobased or recycled content. Warranties can specify certain attributes (such as paper density or lubricant viscosity), which means we need to ensure the product in question meets those attributes.

## **Cost**

**Question:** Do we have to give preference to a designated product that costs significantly more than the parallel product without the specified attribute?

**Response:** We have an exemption if a product is not reasonably priced. It is up to each site to determine what they consider reasonably priced. It is different at each site. The sites that are seeking to receive some sort of sustainable designation tend to allow for higher pricing than sites that do not. Some sites set a percentage limit, saying, for example, up to 5% over is reasonable. In the course of determining price, we need to remember that price is not just the cost of the item. We always need to look at the life cycle cost. Cost includes lost staff time if the “cheaper” item causes health problems (pesticides, for example). It includes the cost of a higher energy bill if the “cheaper” item uses more energy (electrical equipment, for example). It includes disposal costs if the “cheaper” item must be disposed of as a hazardous waste (cleaning products, for example).

## **Tracking**

**Question:** How are other sites tracking the purchase of designated products?

**Response:** How other sites track the purchase of designated products depends on each site's financial system. The sites that have SAP as their financial software have an easier time because if initially set up to track the designated products it lends itself easily to updates, including tracking contracts that have the designated products specified. Oracle (which many DOE sites use) is not as amenable because it requires coding by IT staff to extract data out of it, especially if it was not set up with such an extraction in mind.

Basically we have two systems for gathering data:

- Imbed the requirement to report in our contracts and purchasing agreements so the vendor does the reporting. This meshes well with our requirement to imbed the specifications of the designated products in all contracts and purchasing agreements and is the system we most recommend where feasible.
- Extract the data out of the site's purchasing systems. This is more onerous but possible. To help a site set up tracking systems via the purchasing systems, bring together all staff involved, discuss the present financial software and purchasing systems (identifying which designated products are purchased via contracts, which via purchasing agreements, purchase requests, P-cards, or....) and then develop a plan for extracting data from the systems. There is software available, for instance, that can extract the data from P-Card purchases.

To learn how a few sites are tracking, see the notes of the minutes of the December 9, 2009 teleconference on tracking systems (<http://www.hss.doe.gov/pp/epp/minutes.html>).

## **CAFETERIA PRODUCTS**

### **Dishware – Biobased Availability**

**Question:** Where can we find biobased dishware that meet the criteria?

**Response:** The following are only some of the vendors and brands. You need to verify with each vendor that the particular products you seek have the specified amount of biobased material.

- Biodegradable Food Services - 9" plates from 75% post-consumer recycled paper, plates from 9% sugar cane, forks from 47% cellulose and limestone, knives from 47% cellulose, limestone, biobased adhesive, no petroleum in the Bio Cane or Bio Grade 300 cutlery or in clear containers; only product with petroleum are compost liner bags  
Contact: Kevin Duffy, Tel. 541-593-2191, E-Mail [kevind@bdfs.net](mailto:kevind@bdfs.net), Web <http://www.bdfs.net/products/>
- Earth Bound – Pacific Northwest National Lab used some of their products and were satisfied with them.  
Contact: Brad Price, Tel. 509-910-1430, E-Mail [simplybio@hotmail.com](mailto:simplybio@hotmail.com), Web <http://www.earthbound95.com/simplybiodegradable/index.html>
- Ecotainer – Ecotainer is a replacement for Styrofoam hot cups by International Paper Web [http://internationalpaper.com/Packaging/Packaging\\_Products/Foodservice/ecotainer/ecotainer\\_FAQ.html](http://internationalpaper.com/Packaging/Packaging_Products/Foodservice/ecotainer/ecotainer_FAQ.html)  
Available through Service Paper Company, Dawn Ingram ([dingram@servicepaper.com](mailto:dingram@servicepaper.com))

- Green Earth Office and Kitchen/Food Supply  
Web <http://greenearthofficesupply.stores.yahoo.net/kitsup.html>
- Wilkinson NaturesPlastic - 50% corn based  
Web <http://naturesplastic.wilkmfg.com/products/>

### **Dishware - Biobased Cost**

**Question:** is there biobased dishware available at a price comparable to non-biobased dishware?

**Response:** Not at this time but some factors to consider are

- Whether you can reduce costs by using durable dishware for onsite service and only purchase biobased dishware for offsite service
- Whether your site can compost the biobased dishware and, thereby, reduce disposal costs.

### **Dishware - Disposables versus Durables**

**Question:** For service in the cafeteria (as opposed to take out service), is disposable dishware more cost effective than durable dishware?

**Response:** No. In the late 1990s, the Pacific Northwest National Laboratory did a Pollution Prevention Opportunity Assessment on just that question. The finding was that including the purchase of the dishware, a dishwasher, and staff time, using durable dishware for onsite service paid for itself in less than a year's time.

### **Dishware – Biodegradable**

**Question:** Is there a requirement for DOE sites to purchase biodegradable dishware?

**Response:** No, but, if your site has a compost pile, it could reduce disposal costs by breaking down the dishware into compost. Sending biodegradable dishware to the landfill, though, would neither reduce cost nor biodegrade. Biodegradability has as much to do with the location (landfill or compost pile) as the type of material the product is made of. Biobased products tend to be more biodegradable than petroleum based products. However, if the biobased product goes to the landfill it has very little chance of biodegrading no matter what its percent of biobased material or its biodegradability rating is.

Composting on site can include the traditional grounds and cafeteria debris or it can be a composter specifically designed for cafeterias. Green Mountain Technologies (<http://www.compostingtechnology.com/>) is one manufacturer of cafeteria composters.

If composting on site is not a possibility, you might consider helping establish a regional composting facility.

## **CONSTRUCTION MATERIALS**

### **Carpet – Biobased and Recycled Content**

**Question:** Isn't the only requirement to purchase polyester carpet with recycled content?

**Response:** Yes. Only polyester carpet has been designated to contain 25% recycled PET, and Federal sites only purchase high grade commercial nylon carpet. However, because high grade commercial (6,6) nylon carpet is readily available with 25% recycled content at prices comparable to carpet without recycled content, we have been reporting those purchases. It does not matter where the recycled content is (in the facing, in the backing, in the interim layer). Wherever it is, it counts.

And as of May 14, 2009, we have a requirement to give preference to carpet with a minimum of 7% biobased content regardless of whether polyester or nylon. Check the US Department of Agriculture BioPreferred catalog for vendors (<http://www.catalog.biopreferred.gov/bioPreferredCatalog/faces/jsp/catalogLandi ng.jsp;jsessionid=E84D3E95CE1A22D67CE7A3FCEF713DF1>).

Side Note: Ensure you know all the ingredients in the carpet. Try to avoid any materials that contain hazardous offgassing ingredients, typically found in the backing. Vinyl, in particular, should be avoided.

### **Concrete – Recycled**

**Question:** Does the fly ash in recycled concrete leach out and have the potential to leach into the surrounding ground and eventually groundwater?

**Response:** No. At the July 27, 2006 teleconference, we learned from Bill Aljoe (National Energy Technology Lab - NETL)

- Fly ash has been used in concrete for over 50 years with no leaching problems and no environmental contamination from any constituent even at disposal sites.
- NETL has studied fly ash intensely and determined it is very difficult to leach contaminants from fly ash.
- Fly ash enhances the strength of concrete.
- Typical amount of fly ash should be 10-30% except in freezing temperatures since fly ash slows curing of concrete.

Link to <http://www.epa.gov/epaoswer/osw/conserv/c2p2/index.htm>

NETL has specifications for recycled concrete (<http://www.hss.doe.gov/pp/epp/cement.html>)

## **Concrete – Recycled in Bags**

**Question:** Is concrete with fly ash, blast furnace slag, cenospheres or silica fume available in bags?

**Response:** Yes. The problem is lack of labeling denoting the bag contains recycled content. Two brands that contain recycled content are Basalite and Quikrete. If the cement was produced in an area with fly ash, blast furnace slag, cenospheres, or silica available, the Basalite and Quikrete bags contain the recycled ingredient. If produced in an area where the specified recycled material is not available, the bags do not contain it.

Basalite production codes that denote fly ash and/or blast furnace slag is in the product beginning either with 1406 or 1409. The production codes are printed on the bag in front of the date.

To date the Quikrete production areas we know are producing bags of cement with fly ash are Fremont, CA; Charlotte, NC; Nashville, TN; Pounding Mill, VA; and Martinsville, VA. In addition, Quikrete has a “Green Concrete Mix” which contains 50% or more recycled aggregate such as recycled concrete.

We have asked both Basalite and Quikrete to label their bags denoting whether they contain the specified recycled content.

## **Paint - Recycled**

**Question:** Isn't it more important to purchase a healthy paint without volatile organic compounds than recycled paint?

**Response:** Yes, but those two criteria are not mutually exclusive. Remanufactured paint is available with low-to-no volatile organic compounds. The manufacturers achieve this by only accepting paint from professional sources and in their original cans. One brand of remanufactured paint that has been tested at DOE sites is made by Visions Recycling, Inc., Web [www.visionsrecycling.com](http://www.visionsrecycling.com). The findings were:

- Initially compared by the Pacific Northwest National Laboratory with other environmental brands and found to be the only one evaluated with good coverage in a swatch test
- Tested by Argonne National Laboratory painting an entire room. Test results showed ease of application and good coverage with one coat.
- Costs roughly one-third the price of non-recycled paint
- On GSA schedule, contract #GS-06F-0012M
- Available through local Sherwin Williams store once initial arrangements made
- Will mix to match, using current color card (ICI, Sherwin Williams, etc.) when customer gives color number off that card
- Has a quality control process

- For preferred (major quantity) customers will batch test for contaminants if requested
- Third party certified testing methods show concentrations of metal contaminant equal to or lower than at least two national high end commercial brands and none exceed the metals listed in Title 22.
- For example, no more than 17 grams/liter of volatile organic compounds (EPA standard is no more than 250 gr/lt)

See also Green Seal developed a standard for recycled paint ([www.green Seal.org/draftdocs.htm](http://www.green Seal.org/draftdocs.htm))

## **OFFICE PRODUCTS**

### **Cartridges – Remanufactured - Performance**

**Question:** Our staff complain that remanufactured cartridges 1) produce inferior quality copies, 2) do not print as many copies as virgin cartridges, 3) void printer warranty, and 4) ruin printers. Are we required to give preference to remanufactured cartridges?

**Response:** Yes. None of the areas of concern are valid as demonstrated by years of testing remanufactured cartridges at the Pacific Northwest National Lab and most recently of biobased remanufactured cartridges at DOE Headquarters, Brookhaven National Lab, and Sandia National Labs New Mexico, specifically

- Quality – As with other products, both quality remanufactured cartridges as well as inferior cartridges (both remanufactured and virgin) are on the market. When specifying remanufactured cartridges, either specify ones known to have robust quality control processes, such as
  - West Point Products, Keith McKerley, Cell 412-334-7123, E-mail [kmckerley@westpointproducts.com](mailto:kmckerley@westpointproducts.com)  
Web <http://www.westpointproducts.com/index.aspx>
  - Clover Technologies Group (former GRC), Steve Noyes, Sr VP Contract Sales, Tel 800-464-0272 x1201, Cell 240-460-5280, for models, access <http://www.officedepot.com/> and put “GRC” in search field

Or follow the guidelines for identifying manufacturers of quality cartridges in the US Department of Energy protocol (<http://www.hss.doe.gov/pp/epp/library/ap-toner-cartridge-protocol.pdf>)

- Quantity – To date, the remanufactured cartridges tested have produced as many copies and often more than the national standard for each printer model. The national standard is based on a traditional page of text, which covers roughly 5% of the page. Adjustments need to be made when the copies contain a lot of graphics or other print intense material.
- Warranty - Warranties cover virgin and remanufactured cartridges equally. As an example, look at the bold text in the letter on warranty coverage from

Hewlett Packard (<http://www.hss.doe.gov/pp/epp/library/ap-toner-hp-warranty.pdf>)

- Printer Damage – All of the tests conducted had a technician evaluate the printer both before installation of the remanufactured cartridge to be tested and after the cartridge became spent. All evaluations showed the printer to be in the same prime condition at the end of the test as it was at the beginning of the test.

### **Paper – Recycled – No Exemption**

**Question:** Does no exemption for paper apply to all the types of paper listed on the EPA website under “Printing and Writing Papers,” such as manila folders and calendar paper?

**Response:** No. It only applies to copy/stationary paper.