

THE SUSTAINABLE PURCHASING PROGRAM

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

What is an environmentally preferable product or service?

An environmentally preferable product or service (EPPS) is a product or service that has a lesser or reduced impact on human health and the environment when compared to competing products or services. An EPPS considers environmental factors such as recycled content, toxicity, energy or water consumption, waste, air emissions, and end of life disposal, as appropriate to a given product or service. This is the definition utilized in [Mayoral Order 2009-60](#), D.C. Official Code Section 2-361.01, and [OCP Environmentally Preferable Purchasing Policy 7000.00](#).

What is sustainable purchasing and how does it differ from environmentally preferable purchasing?

For the purposes of the Sustainable Purchasing Program “Sustainable Purchasing” and “Environmentally Preferable Purchasing” are synonymous terms. However, when using terms in a technical context, environmentally preferable purchasing is an activity that focuses primarily on environmental impacts, whereas sustainable purchasing encompasses how purchases impact the environment, economy, and people today and in future generations. All environmental issues fit within the rubric of sustainability.

Is using sustainable specification guidance required by law or policy?

Three directives require District employees to procure environmentally preferable goods and services to the “maximum extent practical.” These laws include: section [2-361.01](#) of the District Code, Procurement Practices Reform Act of 2010 (PPRA); [Mayoral Order 2009-60](#); and [OCP Environmentally Preferable Purchasing Policy 7000.00](#). According to [OCP Environmentally Preferable Purchasing Policy 7000.00](#), utilizing EPPS specifications found in the guidance is sufficient to meet environmentally preferable purchasing requirements detailed in [2-361.01](#) of the District Code, Procurement Practices Reform Act of 2010 (PPRA). The policy also states that contracting staff shall utilize tools and resources and procedures outlined in the Sustainable Purchasing User Guide to support the use of EPPS specifications to the maximum extent practical.

I work for an agency that is not under OCP’s procurement authority? Is my agency required to use sustainable specification guidance?

Section [2-361.01](#) of the District Code, Procurement Practices Reform Act of 2010 (PPRA); [Mayoral Order 2009-60](#) which require the District to procure environmentally preferable goods and services to the maximum extent practical, applies to all agencies. Sustainable specification documents may still be utilized by independent agencies to meet the requirement of these directives or may choose to use alternative approaches to meet the requirements of these directives.

How do I receive education on sustainable purchasing?

All procurement stakeholders should sign up to take “Sustainable Purchasing 101” education. To sign up for a course please contact the Sustainable Purchasing Program, Program Manager, Jonathan Rifkin. Additionally, Product Focused Trainings are expected to be offered for those who wish to learn about a specific product category in the second half of FY2016. To sign up for trainings please e-mail jonathan.rifkin@dc.gov, or follow steps outlined on the OCP Sustainable Purchasing webpage.

Who do I call if I need help understanding guidance documents or developing an EPPS solicitation?

The Sustainable Purchasing Team, led by the Sustainable Purchasing Program Manager, Jonathan Rifkin, is available to answer any questions you may have about the program. He can be reached by e-mail at jonathan.rifkin@dc.gov. You may also email the Sustainable Purchasing Program at sppdc@dc.gov, call the OCP Customer Contact Center at: 202.724.4477, or visit: <http://ocp.dc.gov/page/sustainable-purchasing>.

If some of the products included in the solicitation meet EPPS requirements and others do not, what should I do?

For products like office or cleaning supplies where the solicitations contain a number of individual products, it is likely some products being required will be sustainable and others will not. In such instances, it is recommended that the user split the requirements section into two parts including sustainable products, and a second with sustainable language included. When categorizing a requisition, solicitation or contract award in PASS, if one or more products being procured by the agency is an EPPS product, please select “Yes” using the EPPS indicator in PASS and make a note in the comments that provides as much information as possible about the nature of the procurement.

What if my agency would like to use an environmental requirement that differs from requirements indicated in the specification language? Should I still indicate ‘Yes’ using the EPPS indicator in PASS?

The Sustainable Purchasing Program encourages District agencies to pursue specification requirements that are equal to or more aggressive than District guidance. For example, while the paper specification recommends 30% post-consumer recycled content, agencies can specify higher levels of recycled content if this meets their agency’s goals. In this case, please indicate ‘yes’ in the EPPS indicator in PASS.

In other instances, an agency may be considering using an environmental specification requirement that is not included in the specification guidance because it was not deemed to meet the District’s sustainability, cost, performance, or availability needs. To inquire about a requirement you would like to include that is not in the guidance, please contact the Sustainable Purchasing Program Manager, Jonathan Rifkin at jonathan.rifkin@dc.gov. If you use an alternative specification and do not contact the Sustainable Purchasing Program Manager in advance, please indicate ‘No’ in the EPPS indicator in PASS, select ‘Performance’ as the

reason the specification was not used, and provide detail on the alternative specification used and a contact with which to follow-up in the comments field.

My agency is really into sustainability! We want to be a sustainable purchasing leader in the District! How can we take it up a notch?

Whoa! I love your enthusiasm! I'm glad you asked. The Sustainable Purchasing Program offers product-focused trainings for those who would like to learn more about how to use resources for a specific product or service. These trainings each include a section called, "Beyond the Specification." Here we will teach you ways to make your specification more aggressive. The slides for each product specification will be added to the sustainable specification web page for each product type as they become available.

I would like to develop an EPPS solicitation for a product category for which sustainable guidance is not available, what should I do?

Great! Please contact the Sustainable Purchasing Team, Program Manager, Jonathan Rifkin at jonathan.rifkin@dc.gov. The Sustainable Purchasing Program will continue to develop guidance for new product categories on a rolling basis. We also are available to assist in developing solicitations for new EPPS categories as time allows. Please also notify us if your agency has developed an EPPS solicitation for a new product category as we'd welcome the opportunity to build upon your work and share it with other agencies. Please contact us to discuss how we can work together.

I have a suggested improvement for guidance for a specification. What should I do?

Please contact the Sustainable Purchasing Program Manager at jonathan.rifkin@dc.gov.

I am a contracting professional and my program has developed a statement of work for a product category for which EPPS guidance is available yet it does not appear that EPPS requirements are included in the statement of work or attachments. What should I do?

In accordance with [OCP Environmentally Preferable Purchasing Policy 7000.00](#), if a program submits a requisition that falls under the scope of one of the established EPPS product categories, and it is clear that sustainability was not considered in their market research, as appropriate: contracting staff should 1) Explain that agencies are required to either incorporate EPPS specifications into statements of work for products where guidance is available or indicate that they were not included because of issues related to cost, performance, or availability. You may also want to refer them to the Sustainable Purchasing Program website, recommend enrollment in the next Sustainable Purchasing 101 Training, or call the Sustainable Purchasing Team.

Which products and services does the District maintain sustainable guidance for?

The SPP maintains in-depth resources and guidance for 14 product categories, encompassing more than 100 unique products. The 14 product categories are outlined on the [Sustainable Specifications](#) section of the SPP webpage.

How were the sustainable product categories chosen?

The District chose its current list of 14 product categories based on a prioritization exercise that considered District spend, legal precedence, alignment with Sustainable DC goals and priorities, availability of sustainable alternatives, cost effectiveness, and ease of implementation. A memo explaining the prioritization methodology along with a matrix that ranks sustainable product categories is included in [Attachment C of the Fiscal Year 13 Sustainable Purchasing Report](#). New product categories will be added on a rolling basis.

How were sustainable specifications developed?

Sustainable specifications were developed with a heavy emphasis on stakeholder input. For a given product category the SPP conducted in-depth interviews with vendors and manufacturers, focus groups with DC program managers that use the product or service, and a review of sustainable specification language that other jurisdictions were already utilizing. The specs only include language for products and services that research suggests will be readily available, will meet the needs of a program, and are reasonably priced.

Is there a specific price percentage premium that I need to be aware of that indicates whether I need to purchase, or not purchase, a sustainable product?

No. The Sustainable Purchasing Program does not establish a finite price premium percentage that informs the decision to purchase, or not purchase, a sustainable product. Rather, we rely on the judgment and good faith effort of our procurement teams to make this decision. Choosing a specific price premium percentage would have been exceedingly difficult to implement, and would have created unacceptable strain on our resources. Instead, the Sustainable Purchasing Program conducted basic price analysis on all relevant products as each specification was developed. If a sustainable product seemed prohibitively expensive, had questionable performance issues, or were not readily available in the marketplace, you will not find it in the specification.

Don't sustainable products cost more than normal products?

It depends. There is a common misconception that all sustainable products will cost more than their counter parts but this is not true. Some products do cost more. There are also many products that are relatively similar in price, and a host of other products that are actually cheaper, especially when considering products that save energy over the course of their life. The background and benefits section of the specification guidance documents for each product category and product-focused trainings provide more information on the relative costs of sustainable products compared to conventional ones for each EPPS product category.

I am a vendor, how can I find sustainable solicitations? Can I register to be a vendor of sustainable products?

The District does not maintain a unique certification for Sustainable Vendors, nor does it maintain a list of sustainable solicitation opportunities. Rather, the goal of the Sustainable Purchasing Program is to provide District agencies with sustainable specification language that

can be included in market research. Vendors are encouraged to review sustainable specification language available on the OCP webpage, and take steps to ensure such requirements can be met if a District agency includes sustainable requirements in future solicitations.

I am a vendor and I believe one of the sustainable specifications can be improved. Who should I contact?

If you have recommended revisions for an existing specification, please email your recommendation to sppdc@dc.gov. The Sustainable Purchasing Program plans will periodically review and update existing specification language. We will consider your recommendations during scheduled review. Please also register to receive ongoing updates about the Sustainable Purchasing Program on the "[Contact Us](#)" section of the webpage.

Where do I find resources about the District's Sustainable Purchasing Program?

The [Sustainable Purchasing Program webpage](#) is available on the OCP internet and Intranet page. The program webpage is located under the "Opportunities and Support" section of the Internet at www.ocp.dc.gov, and under the "Sustainable Purchasing" link on the OCP Intranet page at www.ocp.in.dc.gov. The webpage will provide information about the program, sustainable specifications and relevant guidance and resources for 14 relevant product categories, implementation guidance, and contact information.