

Green products get green light

Federal initiatives favor the purchase of environmentally friendly goods

GREEN PROCUREMENT IS NOT NEW. CONGRESS recognized its potential when it enacted the Resource Conservation and Recovery Act (RCRA) in 1976. RCRA directs the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) to identify products made with recycled waste materials or solid waste byproducts and develop guidelines for purchasing them. These are the four federal green purchasing programs.

Comprehensive Procurement Guidelines (CPG). This program is administered by EPA's Office of Solid Waste and Emergency Response. EPA has designated 54 product categories for which recycled-content versions must be chosen over nonrecycled alternatives, provided that the recycled products are reasonably available and comparable in performance. EPA issued the first CPG in 1995 pursuant to RCRA Section 6002 and Executive Order 12783.

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Subsequent executive orders, especially Executive Order 13101, have reinforced the program.

Energy Star. This program was created in 1992 to encourage energy efficiencies and to reduce domestic energy consumption. It now evaluates and labels products including computers, light fixtures and building materials.

Environmental Preferable Purchasing (EPP) Program. This program was established in 1988 pursuant to Executive Order 13101, which requires executive agencies to identify and give preference to environmentally friendly products and services.

Biomass Research and Development Initiative. This program holds much promise for jump-starting the development of new biobased product markets. The Biomass Initiative coordinates all federal bio-based products, bio-energy research and development, and is intended to promote the use of renewable biomass materials as an alternative to conventional energy sources.

The Farm Security and Rural Investment Act, signed

on May 13, 2002, created a program under which federal agencies give preference to purchasing biobased products. The act also includes a voluntary biobased labeling program.

On Jan. 11, USDA issued a final rule pursuant to Section 9002 of the Farm Security and Rural Investment Act, which requires the establishment of a mandatory federal procurement preference for biobased products. USDA established a program to designate items eligible for preferred procurement and to set minimum biobased content levels for designated items; specify methods for determining biobased content, life-cycle costs, environmental and health benefits and performance; identify product requirements so manufacturers and vendors can self-certify the products for preferred procurement eligibility; and describe requirements for the preferred procurement program that federal agencies must adopt by Jan. 11, 2006.

The federal government's green purchasing programs will continue to grow, likely at a more aggressive pace. These programs will influence purchasing preferences beyond traditional government markets because of the need to be green — or at least greener than the competition. Various right-to-know laws, policies and programs, for example, have made government and private product purchasers more sophisticated regarding the presence of materials deemed toxic. As manufacturers continue to market the green nature of their goods, the global awareness of product composition will increase, and so will the pressure to think green.

Mandatory programs such as those required under RCRA will continue to grow. Voluntary initiatives will also progress. Government incentives, such as tax credits for biobased products and other renewables, will continue to drive businesses toward creation of green products. More than 40 state and local governments are now implementing some form of environmentally preferable purchasing. Smart businesspeople will see the power of green purchasing and reflect this in their operations. **CP**

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