

US EPA ARCHIVE DOCUMENT



WasteWise Tip Sheet

Buying or Manufacturing Recycled Products



WasteWise Program Elements

- Waste Prevention
- Recycling Collection
- Buying or Manufacturing Recycled Products

What Is "Buying Recycled"?

"Buying recycled" means purchasing recycled products (products made with recovered materials). A necessary precedent to "buying recycled" is that manufacturers purchase recovered materials and use them in lieu of virgin materials in the manufacture of new products.

What Are the Benefits of Buying or Manufacturing Goods with Recycled Content?

Purchasing recycled products or recovered materials for manufacturing conserves valuable landfill space by using goods made from materials that otherwise would have been discarded. Using recycled products and packaging also conserves natural resources and energy. In addition, purchasing recycled products promotes the continued manufacture of these products and helps strengthen markets for collected materials.

How Does Purchasing Recycled Products and Recovered Raw Materials Fit into the WasteWise Program?

This component of the WasteWise program helps to "close the recycling loop" by encouraging the manufacture and purchase of products containing recovered materials, thus providing more customers for the recyclable materials that companies and communities are collecting.

Companies in the WasteWise program commit to purchase products containing either *preconsumer* or *postconsumer* recycled content in lieu of products manufactured from virgin materials, and/or purchase products with an increased percentage of *preconsumer* or *postconsumer* recycled content in goods already being purchased. Participants are asked to monitor their progress over the calendar year and report annually on the amount of money spent on the purchase of recycled products.

Manufacturers also have the option of increasing the percentage of *postconsumer* content in a product or product line they manufacture. Manufacturers who choose this option will monitor their progress over the calendar year and report annually on the increase of *postconsumer* content in each product or product line selected.

Other elements of the WasteWise program include a commitment to implement significant waste prevention activities and to expand or improve programs to collect recyclable materials.



What Do Recycled Content Terms Mean?

The terminology used to refer to recycling, recycled products, and recovered raw materials can seem confusing. The following definitions are provided to help clarify some of these terms.

- **Recycled content.** The portion of a product, by weight or volume, that is composed of preconsumer and/or postconsumer recovered materials.
- **Preconsumer materials.** Materials recovered for recycling prior to use by the consumer, excluding materials and by-products generated from and commonly reused within an original manufacturing process. Examples of preconsumer recovered materials are envelope cuttings and scrap from plastic manufacturing.
- **Postconsumer materials.** Materials that have served their intended use as consumer items and have been recovered or diverted from solid waste for recycling. Examples of postconsumer recovered materials include used beverage containers and old computer printouts.

The percentage of recovered materials used in a product or within product categories can vary significantly. For example, corrugated boxes can be made from 0 to 40 percent postconsumer materials. Generally, higher levels of recycled content are desirable, but other factors, such as performance requirements, will likely need to be considered in your purchase decision.

Although WasteWise does not require that you seek out products with postconsumer content, EPA encourages businesses to do so in order to create markets for materials that have been collected by businesses and communities. Manufacturers that choose to increase the recycled content in their products as their WasteWise commitment are required to select *postconsumer* materials in order to help build markets for materials collected by businesses and communities.

What Kind of Products Are Available with Recycled Content?

A wide variety of products are now available with recycled content, including:

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| ■ Paper and paperboard products | ■ Bicycle racks |
| ■ Retread tires | ■ Wall panels |
| ■ Oil | ■ Sign posts |
| ■ Insulation | ■ Garbage bags |
| ■ Road building materials | ■ Fiberboard |
| ■ Erasable boards | ■ Furniture |
| ■ Mulch | ■ Fences and fence posts |
| ■ Geotextiles | ■ Sign posts |
| ■ Plastic pipe | ■ Office products |
| ■ Plastic desk accessories | ■ Wastebaskets |
| ■ Outdoor benches and tables | ■ Carpeting |
| ■ Playground equipment | ■ Binders |

Do Products and Raw Materials with Recovered Material Content Cost More Than Virgin Products and Materials?

The cost-competitiveness of recovered materials and products is highly variable and dependent on the specific product or material, and supply and demand market forces. For example, in the past, paper made with recovered content was often considerably more expensive than virgin paper. Today, however, the price of many types of recycled paper is comparable to that of virgin paper. As more recycled products of all types are purchased, manufacturers increasingly will realize economies of scale, and prices should tend to decrease and stabilize.

Are Recycled Products and Recovered Raw Materials of High Quality?

In the past, some recycled products did not perform as well as their virgin counterparts. Today, however, recycled products are manufactured to meet the same performance standards as virgin products. Work with your vendors to purchase recycled products that meet your needs and specifications. When considering any new product, whether it is made from virgin or recovered materials, it is advisable to obtain samples and, if necessary, to test the products on your equipment and with your end users.

When using recovered raw materials to manufacture recycled products, the key to quality is securing reliable quantities of clean, homogenous materials. The quality of recovered materials should meet your operation's technical specifications. Be sure to consider performance standards or applicable regulations before switching to recovered raw materials.

How Do We Start or Improve Our "Buy Recycled" Program?

A program to preferentially purchase recycled products should involve end users, operations staff, and company purchasing managers. You can start buying recycled by determining which products and raw materials used by your company are available with recycled content. Select these as an alternative to virgin products or materials, where possible. To get started, you may want to begin with one or a few product categories.

You should review contract specifications and revise them to encourage suppliers to provide recycled content products and raw materials. Companies sometimes require more stringent product specifications than are actually needed. For example, many companies have very high paper brightness standards for applications where high brightness is not necessary. Reviewing and revising paper brightness standards would facilitate the purchase of recycled paper.

Sources of Additional Information

The Buy Recycled Guide. This guide describes the basics of purchasing products with recycled content and provides state information and contacts.

Buy Recycled Business Alliance
National Recycling Coalition
1101 30th Street NW., Suite 305
Washington, DC 20007
202 625-6406

The Official Recycled Products Guide. \$155 per single issue, \$275 per year for updates and a monthly newsletter. This is a comprehensive catalogue of recycled products, indexed by product category and recovered material content. It also contains an extensive reference section.

American Recycling Market, Inc.
P.O. Box 577
Ogdensburg, NY 13669
800 267-0707

McDonald's McRecycle USA, March 1992. Free. This 206-page reference provides information focused on recycled construction materials and products.

McDonald's Corporation
McDonald's Plaza
Oak Brook, IL 60521
800 220-3809

Buy Recycled Training Manual, December, 1993. \$20.00. Although the audience for this training manual is government agencies, the information also is applicable to the private sector.

Richard Keller
The Northeast Maryland Waste Disposal Authority
25 South Charles Street, Suite 2105
Baltimore, MD 21401
410 333-2730

The Business and Government Buyers Guide to Recycled Products, 1992. \$24.95. This 166-page document provides general information on buying recycled with specific information on markets in California.

Buy Recycled Campaign
Californians Against Waste Foundation
926 J Street, Suite 606
Sacramento, CA 95814
916 443-8317

Resource Guide to Office Products Manufacturers, Recycling, Products, and Programs, 1993. \$20.00. This 71-page book lists companies that sell recycled-content office products.

National Office Products Association
301 N. Fairfax Street
Alexandria, VA 22314
703 549-9040



WasteWise is a partnership between EPA and America's leading businesses. Participants set their own waste prevention, recycling, and recycled product purchasing goals. WasteWise supports company efforts through technical assistance and recognition of participants' successes.

For more information about any aspect of WasteWise, call 800 EPAWISE (800 372-9473).