

## Environmentally Preferable Purchasing

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**W**hat is environmentally preferable purchasing? The answer is a simple one—merely considering the environmental impact associated with the products and services you use, then, based on these considerations, making purchasing decisions that are the least damaging to human health and natural resources. “Green purchasing” serves as a foundation for sustainable medicine in your healthcare facility since the choices made will significantly influence the overall environmental impact of your medical practices.

Fortunately, implementing environmentally preferable purchasing policies makes good financial sense—it minimizes later costs associated with higher-risk products. For example, purchasing mercury-free thermometers eliminates costs associated with incineration, the only acceptable disposal method for mercury-laden hazardous waste. While the initial financial investment for toxic-free products may be higher, the overall benefits are significant, including reduced “downstream” fees (such as just mentioned), minimized waste and pollution, healthier provider-patient interactions, and a safer healthcare environment for the community. Environmentally preferable purchasing follows a product-stewardship model by considering the entire lifecycle of a product—from its production and use, to its disposal—while accounting for *all* costs, not just what you pay upfront.

Environmentally preferable products/services are non-toxic, energy efficient, safer for people and the environment, and free from harmful fragrances. In addition, they reduce waste, conserve resources, and minimize pollution.

### Environmentally Preferable Purchasing Ideas

To jiggle your brain, here are a few buying suggestions:

- Mercury-free products and services
- Recycled/reusable/non-toxic office/janitorial products and services
- Medical products with reduced polyvinyl chloride (PVC)/ Di(2-ethylhexyl) phthalate (DEHP)
- Energy-efficient equipment
- Hormone and pesticide-free meats and produce for staff and patients

And here are some long-term goals:

- Reduce materials/services used and disposed
- Increase the amount of reusable materials
- Rely on recycled materials to minimize unnecessary production and waste
- Donate or exchange reusable products/services (ie, electronics, medical supplies, etc)
- Create a safe and healthy environment for providers, staff, and patients by eliminating toxins in the workplace
- Reduce long-term costs through eco-friendly purchases

### How to Implement Environmentally Preferable Purchasing Policy

It is neither expensive nor difficult to be ecologically minded. Following are some action points you can easily do.

1. Conduct product assessments within the following areas of your clinic—revealing opportunities for using toxin-free materials and optimizing resources:
  - Janitorial supplies
  - Office supplies
  - Medical technology and services
  - Medical waste disposal
  - Electronic equipment usage
  - Food procurement and delivery
2. Identify sustainability objectives and goals that are measurable and feasible, such as:
  - Convene an ecologically minded purchasing committee
  - Identify and avoid products containing mercury or other dangerous pollutants
  - Locate green distributors and implement a purchasing policy for buying products that are mercury/dangerous pollutant-free
  - Track purchasing decisions and monitor cost-benefit analysis
3. Determine purchasing resources to achieve these goals.
4. Develop policies and procedures to ensure that purchasing habits are implemented and regularly evaluated for success.
5. Educate and train providers, administrators, and employees about changes, ensuring cooperation and compatibility with environmentally preferable purchasing policies.

*Note: Environmentally preferable purchasing is 1 of the methods for “greening” a health clinic, which is part of Teleosis Green Health Care Online, an 8-week leadership-training course in the emerging discipline of sustainable medicine. For more information about greening a medical clinic, see [www.teleosis.org](http://www.teleosis.org).*

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