



Evaluation of the Environmentally Preferable Purchasing Program

November 2013

Fact Sheet

Introduction

- EPA's Environmentally Preferable Purchasing (EPP) Program was established in 1993 by Executive Order 12873. It has been reaffirmed by subsequent Executive Orders, most recently Executive Order 13514, "Federal Leadership in Environmental, Energy, and Economic Performance," in 2009. The program is administered by EPA's Office of Pollution Prevention and Toxics (OPPT).
- The EPP Program aims to achieve significant reductions in the environmental footprint of federal purchasing and make the overall consumer marketplace more sustainable through federal leadership.
- EPP activities include spearheading or participating in the development of product and service standards, creating procurement guidance, sharing model contract language, and developing other tools to help buyers assess products and services.
- OPPT requested a program evaluation by EPA's Office of Policy to better understand EPP outcomes in terms of quantitative changes in spending on environmentally preferable products and services, resulting environmental benefits, and influence and utility of EPP activities and outputs, including changes since an EPP baseline qualitative assessment was conducted in 2001.
- The evaluation focused on EPP activities and outcomes in three sectors: electronics, building and construction products, and hospitality and travel services.

Evaluation Questions

- The evaluation explored 14 questions in the following areas:
 - Changes in federal purchaser awareness and behavior toward environmentally preferable purchasing since the 2001 baseline assessment.
 - Changes in the proportion of environmentally preferable products and services purchased by federal agencies.
 - Environmental benefits of federal green purchasing (e.g., reduced energy use and associated greenhouse gas emissions, and reduced use of hazardous materials).
 - Use of EPP Program outputs by federal agencies, including voluntary consensus standards, and the contribution of EPP activities to changes in federal green purchasing.
 - Effectiveness of the Federal Electronics Challenge (FEC).
 - EPP Program outcomes beyond the federal realm, including marketplace acceptance of standards that EPP helped to develop.

Evaluation Methods

- Analyzed data on federal purchasing in general, and green purchasing in particular, as available from federal and non-federal sources, such as the Electronic Product Environmental Assessment Tool (EPEAT) and the FEC.
- Conducted over 40 interviews with EPP management and staff, federal and non-federal purchasing and policy staff, stakeholders involved in developing voluntary consensus standards, and hospitality and travel stakeholders.
- Conducted a federal purchaser survey on green purchasing behavior, attitudes, and awareness; approximately 2,500 purchasers completed the survey. Conducted statistical analyses comparing survey respondents with low and high EPP exposure.
- Conducted a "mini-market" analysis and case studies of manufacturers that sell certified products to the federal government.

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Key Findings

- **Federal green purchasing awareness and behavior have improved substantially since the 2001 baseline assessment.** Perceived quality problems with green products, a large concern in the 2001 study, is no longer a significant concern. Purchasers are more likely to view green purchasing criteria positively and as part of their responsibility. Nonetheless, environmentally preferable purchasing is still not routine. Perceptions of higher cost, lack of information, and unclear definition of “green” are barriers to environmentally preferable purchasing.
- **Purchasing data is scarce, scattered, and inconsistent.** There is no comprehensive and reliable source of federal green purchasing data; agency-specific data, including EPA’s, is also limited. The electronics sector has relatively robust purchasing data, as both EPEAT and FEC carefully track federal and broader market purchasing.
- **Direct use of EPP Program outputs by federal purchasers is limited, but all EPP outputs tested in the survey were rated moderately or very helpful by a majority of purchasers who have used them.** In general, higher exposure to EPP outputs is statistically associated with greener current purchasing behavior. However, purchasers rely more heavily on agency-specific purchasing policies in their purchasing decisions. The EPP Program is designed to have an indirect influence on purchasers as agencies adopt contract language and integrate other EPP outputs into agency-specific purchasing policies.
- **Green voluntary consensus standards have a dedicated following among federal buyers, but the reach of standards varies.** A high percent of purchasers who regularly purchase building and construction standards look for standards that EPP helped to develop, but the EPEAT penetration rate among federal buyers is only 33%. However, buyers who purchase EPEAT products tend to specify EPEAT for most applicable purchases.
- **Beyond the federal realm, awareness and use of EPEAT is widespread; carpet and furniture standards have good market penetration, but limited data on actual purchases.** The resilient flooring (non-carpet) and gypsum board standards have had less widespread adoption by manufacturers, although the two largest U.S. gypsum board companies use the standard. Comprehensive data are not yet available for the green meetings and events standards. Absence of federal recognition of meeting and events standards is an obstacle to their use.
- **Strong but indirect evidence suggests that FEC partners purchased EPEAT electronics at higher rates than the rest of the federal government,** at least during the early years of the EPEAT program.
- **Environmental benefits appear significant for electronics, but are hard to quantify elsewhere** due both to the absence of reliable sales data and the lack of broadly-accepted environmental calculators.

Recommendations

- If EPA’s draft guidelines for evaluating environmental standards and eco-labels move ahead, EPP should develop and execute a promotion campaign for standards meeting the guidelines. If not, EPP should focus more narrowly on product categories that have a consumer audience and other factors contributing to market success.
- Continue to remain engaged with standards that EPP has worked on to date, to ensure that environmental considerations are addressed as standards are revised.
- Work with the General Services Administration (GSA), Council on Environmental Quality, Office of the Federal Environmental Executive, and other relevant agencies to advocate for including standards meeting the draft guidelines in the Federal Acquisition Regulation.
- Continue to work to include building and construction standards in GSA Schedules and in the U.S. Green Building Council’s LEED family of standards.
- Review purchasing policies of other agencies for consistency with EPP guidance.
- Explore development of environmental calculators in other areas, such as building and construction products and travel and hospitality services.
- Partner with EPA’s Office of Administration and Resources Management to collect better green purchasing data within EPA. Engage in an active dialogue with GSA on options for improving government-wide data collection on green purchases.

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