

# Green Ambassadors: “Buy Recycled Office Supplies” Campaign December 2012

## FAQ

We hope your coworkers will join us in ordering recycled content office supplies to reduce the County’s environmental impact. Choosing recycled-content products can go a long way towards protecting our climate, preventing pollution, and preserving natural resources. Here are some questions your coworkers may ask as they engage in the campaign along with responses that may be helpful for you.

*Please let us know what additional questions you receive because this helps network members learn from each other’s experiences.*

### **Q. Why is it important to order recycled-content office supplies?**

- A. There are many things you consider when ordering office supplies. How does the product perform? Is it cost-effective for your agency? Will we use it? Another thing to consider is what impact what we buy has on the world around us and our community.

Alameda County strives to have a small impact on the environment. Local governments like Alameda County purchase a large number of goods and services that we use to help us provide services to residents. In 2011, we purchased approximately [add your spend here] of office supplies in addition to over [add your spend here] of office paper and [add your spend here] of ink and toner products. It is important to order recycled content office supplies because this is an easy step Alameda County employees can take to reduce the County’s environmental impact.

### **Q. How are we doing now?**

- A. In 2011, [add your performance here] of the paper office supplies (like notepads, folders, envelopes, etc.) purchased by Alameda County through our office supplies contract contained at least 20% post-consumer recycled content. (This does not include our purchases of copy/printing paper.)

[add your performance here] of the non-paper office supplies purchased (like binders, scissors, etc.) contained at least 25% post-consumer recycled content. (This figure does not include our purchases of toner cartridges or batteries.)

### **Q. What is the difference between post-consumer and pre-consumer recycled content?**


- A. Post-consumer recycled content means that the product contains a material that would normally be disposed of, having served its intended purpose as a consumer item. When the recyclables you set out at home or at work for recycling collection are used in a product, they contribute post-consumer recycled content. “Pre-consumer material” means material or by-products discarded after manufacture of a product

but before the product reaches the end-use consumer. This type of material is more routinely re-used by manufacturers. We are measuring improvements in average post-consumer content in our purchases.

**Q. How do I order recycled content office supplies?**

A. It's easy! When identifying what to order online:

- Visit vendor's website
- Add the word "recycled" to your product search in the "Quick Search" box when searching for office supplies to order online and order these recycled content office supply alternatives.

When identifying what to order by catalog, look for green chasing arrows symbol  to find recycled content office supply alternatives.

**Q. What are some common products with recycled content alternatives that I can try?**

A. Examples of recycled content products include:

- Paper supplies: notepads, notebooks, stenobooks, post-it notes, file folders, storage files, index tabs, copy paper, envelopes, storage boxes;
- Other: binders, pens, desktop trays, scissors, paper clips, and other plastic and metal desktop accessories.

**Q. Are recycled content office supplies more expensive?**

A. Recycled content office supplies are often priced similarly to their traditional counterparts. If a product cost a little more than their traditional counterparts, consider this: our Board of Supervisors adopted an environmentally preferable purchasing policy in April 2011 that encourages the use of recycled content products ([http://www.acgov.org/sustain/documents/EPP\\_resolutionpolicy.pdf](http://www.acgov.org/sustain/documents/EPP_resolutionpolicy.pdf)), noting that agencies and employees shall aim to "procure products that contain the highest percentage of post-consumer recycled content material that are available in the marketplace." While cost is important, we encourage you to consider the environmental and human health benefits buying recycled content office supplies offer compared to traditional products.

If cost is a barrier for your department, we encourage you to find ways to make the effort cost neutral. For instance, implement a permanent office supply swap location so your office purchases fewer supplies overall. Or switch to remanufactured or high-yield toner cartridges which save up to 60% or 20% respectively. (Note that multi-function devices that scan, print, and copy are on leases that include toner as part service.)

Over time, prices may change and become more competitive due to market maturity or contract renegotiations. Please be sure to check current pricing periodically!

**Q. Will I be able to find recycled content products that are similar quality to the products I currently purchase?**

- A. Many recycled content products compare well in quality to their traditional counterparts. As with any product on the market, quality depends on several factors. Quality may also depend on the product's maturity in the market. The quality of recycled paper, for instance, has come a long way in the last twenty years. For the most part, its quality is just as high as that of virgin paper. As with any product (including virgin products), if one brand does not meet your expectations, you may need to experiment with a different vendor or brand to find the product that meets your specific needs.

**Q. What can I do if my department does not support ordering recycled content office supplies?**

- A. If the concern is over quality, target products that are very difficult to tell the difference between. Good choices are post-it notes, folders, paper clips, and certain metal and plastic desktop accessories.

If the concern is over cost, find ways to make the effort cost-neutral. For instance, implement a permanent office supply swap location so your office purchases are less overall. Or switch to remanufactured printer cartridges or high-yield cartridges which save up to 60% or 20% respectively. (Note that multi-function devices that scan print and copy are on leases that include toner as part of service.)

It also might be helpful to know that the Alameda County Board of Supervisors adopted an Environmentally Preferable Purchasing Resolution and Policy in 2011 that explicitly encourages the purchase of recycled content products ([http://www.acgov.org/sustain/documents/EPP\\_resolutionpolicy.pdf](http://www.acgov.org/sustain/documents/EPP_resolutionpolicy.pdf)), noting that agencies and employees shall aim to "procure products that contain the highest percentage of post-consumer recycled content material that are available in the marketplace."

**Q. What are the environmental benefits of selecting recycled content office supplies?**

- A. All products we buy have environmental and human health impacts throughout their entire lifecycle from resource extraction through manufacture, use, and disposal. Buying less, and buying greener products, can help mitigate these from your purchases. Recycled content products reduce the environmental impact of resource extraction, because they are using resources from products that have already been made. They also reduce the impact of transportation because these resources are usually available more locally than the virgin materials. They reduce the impact of manufacture because the material has already been processed.

100% recycled content paper, for example, can reduce greenhouse gas emissions by 37%, cut solid waste disposal in half, decrease water use by 50%, and practically eliminate wood use. One ton of 30% postconsumer recycled content paper (40 cartons of 10 reams each) saves over 7 trees (StopWaste.Org 2012).

If every department in the County switched to 100% post-consumer recycled content office paper (look for "100% PC" in Alcolink), we would save 6000 trees and reduce greenhouse gases as much as removing 200 cars from the road for one year. So imagine what a difference it would make for all of our office supplies to be recycled content!

**Q. What else can we do to green our office supply order?**

A. There are several options.

First, look for lightly used products in your department's office supply closet or supply reuse area. (If you don't have a supply reuse area, you can start one. Binders are a great candidate for reuse.)

For durable office supply goods like desk organizers or chair pads, contact Property & Salvage to see if they have any available.

Consolidating your group's orders will reduce the greenhouse gas emissions associated with transporting your order to you. It can also reduce the number of cardboard boxes you have to recycle. A little planning ahead can pay big dividends. Review your order history and explore these options with your department to develop a simple ordering protocol. For example, you might:

- Set a regular date when orders will be placed, such as payday Fridays; or
- Have one person collect orders until a certain dollar threshold is met.

See the Green Office Supplies handout (see "tipsheet" at <http://alcoweb.acgov.org/gsa/green/guide/office.htm>)

for what to look for in terms of waste reduction and toxic reduction, such as refillable pens, rechargeable batteries, low-odor markets, and non-vinyl binders.

**Q. How will we know how we are doing?**

A. GSA is checking each participating department's recycled-content product report to see how much recycled content was in the office supplies you ordered before and after this campaign. We'll check our progress in a few months, so keep searching for recycled content in your orders!

**Q. How do I win the prize of one of four \$25 Amazon.com gift cards?**

A. Have your Green Ambassador submit a photo showing you using/holding a recycled-content product to GSA by January 18, and you'll be entered in a random drawing for the prize. (This photo would ideally feature an office supply you are trying for the first time in a recycled-content version. If you do not need any new office supplies at this time, you may submit a photo with a recycled-content item already available to you.)

**References & For More Information:**

StopWaste.Org, Green Purchasing Frequently Asked Questions:  
<http://www.stopwaste.org/home/index.asp?page=734>

Alameda County, Green Purchasing Program & Green Buying Guide:  
<http://alcoweb.acgov.org/gsa/green/>