# Going Beyond Recycling, Buy Recycled

## Guide For School Districts

California Integrated Waste Management Board

RECYCLE
PRODUCT

## Buy Recycled

Recycling is not complete until we close the loop—by purchasing recycled-content products. Buying recycled products stimulates markets for recycled materials, which in turn strengthens the whole recycling loop. The greater the **demand** for **recycled products**, the more businesses will manufacture these products, and the more demand there will be for recyclable materials.

Demand has been increasing over the past couple of years, and recycled products have become more prevalent in the market place. If you have tried in the past to purchase recycled products and found them to be cost prohibitive or of poor quality, TRY AGAIN. Many companies have been improving their recycled product lines to **compete with virgin products**. In addition, the demand is bringing prices down.

## What can you do?

Purchasing is a key component in implementing a comprehensive waste management program for your district. The following tips will assist you in developing a successful **waste prevention** and recycled product procurement program for your district.

## Buying Power

Humboldt County's Office of Education, Humboldt County, and the county's school districts formed a partnership to **buy recycled-content paper.** The Office of Education was the lead for the purchase. The other agencies purchase their supply of paper from the Office of Education. This partnership has been successful because the agencies **get a volume discount** hat they could not qualify for individually.

## Generate Commitment

Seek support from the school board and superintendent. A policy statement or resolution stating the district's goals formalizes the administration's commitment to "closing the loop." (See Bakersfield Union School District's resolution.)

People are your greatest asset. Seek ideas from staff and students. This will not only generate some good ideas for you, but will create buy-in and ownership for your program.

## Become Educated About Recycled Products and Waste Prevention

Contact your local city/county recycling coordinator for information on recycled products, waste prevention efforts, and cooperative purchasing programs.

Obtain information on recycled product availability and performance from the following:

- Vendors and manufacturers
- The Board's recycled products database at www.ciwmb.ca.gov/BuyRecycled/

Educate staff and students, through in-services, newsletters, or student recycling teams, on waste prevention goals and buying recycled products. Many recycled-content products cost less than comparable non-recycled-content products. For example, at one school district staff were requesting "astrobrite" paper, which is fluorescent. However, astrobrite paper was not accepted by the recycler because it could not be recycled. The solution—inform staff that the district would not purchase this type of paper due to its inability to be recycled. Not only would this solve a recycling problem, it also would save the district money, as astrobrite can be five times as expensive as white paper.

## Examine Specifications

Review existing purchasing policies to be certain they do not exclude the use of recycled materials and/or products designed to be reused or recycled. Buying recycled products typically does not mean sacrificing quality or performance. However, some existing standards may be overly specific, preventing purchasers from buying perfectly acceptable recycled products. In addition, some procurement standards directly prohibit the **purchase** of **recycled products**, based on a misconception that they are always of lower quality.

Identify products currently in use which are available with recycled content, such as paper, playground surfacing, and plastic bags.

Write product specifications that are consistent with recycling operations; e.g., don't buy colored bond if you are **recycling** white office **paper** only and white paper can be used in place of colored bond.

Set goals for purchasing products containing recycled materials that you are recycling; e.g., purchase recycled paper.

**Align recycling program goals** and purchasing choices; e.g., buy products with recycled content and attempt to **reduce** the total amount purchased wherever possible.

Set incremental goals to increase the amount of recycled-content products purchased, such as paper and plastic picnic tables. This might mean that one-half of the total paper the district buys this year has recycled content, and three-fourths of the total paper the school buys next year will have **recycled content**, and so on.

TWO SIDES
ARE BETTER
AN ONE

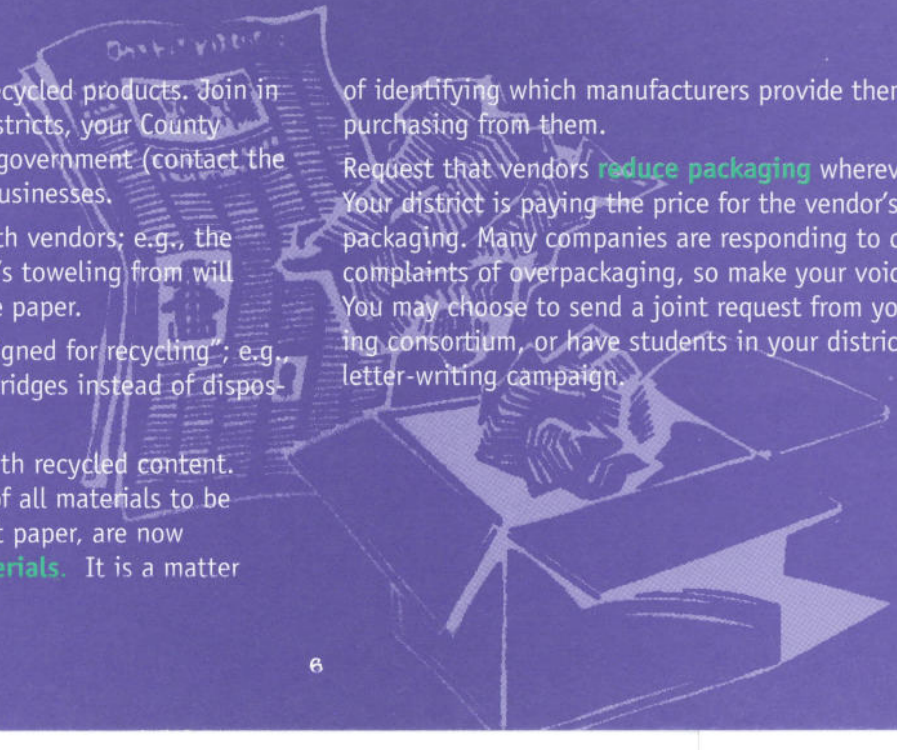
Establish **purchasing co-ops** for recycled products. Join in a partnership with other school districts, your County Office of Education, state or local government (contact the recycling coordinator), and local businesses.

Develop **exchange agreements** with vendors; e.g., the company you purchase the district's toweling from will agree to pick up all your recyclable paper.

Make buying choices that are "designed for recycling"; e.g., buying recyclable laser printer cartridges instead of disposable ones.

Purchase a diversity of products with recycled content. Examine the source and contents of all materials to be purchased; many products, not just paper, are now available made from **recycled materials**. It is a matter of identifying which manufacturers provide them and purchasing from them.

Request that vendors **reduce packaging** wherever possible. Your district is paying the price for the vendor's excessive packaging. Many companies are responding to customer complaints of overpackaging, so make your voice heard. You may choose to send a joint request from your purchasing consortium, or have students in your district initiate a letter-writing campaign.



## Establish A Preference Program

Start with your usual solicitation text and formats. Reference the **recovered materials content** requirement in the specifications or put the recovered materials content requirement in the solicitation.

Require certification of minimum recovered materials content.

To maximize availability, do not use "all or none" requirements. Allow vendors to offer one or more of the items covered by a solicitation.

Modify purchasing policies to promote procurement of products which:

1. are designed to last long (e.g., have long warranties and available repair services),
2. **can be reused** or recycled,
3. are made from recycled materials, and
4. have minimal packaging, if any.

This can be accomplished in several ways, including:

- Providing a policy statement to purchasing agents.
- Allowing a purchase preference if price, quality, and availability are equal when buying recycled-content products.
- Allowing a price preference for durable, reusable, repairable, and recycled products. A price preference is a way to recognize that many kinds of virgin materials receive tax breaks and other incentives which drive down the prices of their products. Consider using cost savings from waste reduction activities to pay for more expensive, but less wasteful, products.
- Using "set-asides," that is, requiring that a certain portion of the purchasing requirement for a given commodity be satisfied with products that meet waste reduction standards. Also, many durable products compare more favorably if a longer pay-back period is considered.

## Promote!

At a minimum, inform your existing vendors, in advance, that solicitations will include a recovered materials requirement. In addition, state in bid packets that the district is committed to the environment and encourage suppliers to participate in waste prevention and recycling.

Inform the school board, superintendent, staff, students, and the community of your successes. This will garner additional support for your efforts.

## Monitor and assess the program's success

Identify barriers you encounter, and assess strategies to overcome these roadblocks. Manufacturers are clearly making attempts to produce **"green"** products and will continue to do so as long as there is a demand.

The best advice for starting a waste prevention and recycled product procurement program in your district is **JUST DO IT!** After organizing, researching, and planning, jump in and start. Look for lower cost recycled-content products first, and you will receive immediate support and approval. You will learn by doing. Although you may encounter some resistance at the onset, **DON'T GIVE UP!**

Always be on the lookout for ways to improve or expand your program. As you receive ongoing feedback, be prepared to modify your program to meet the needs of the staff and students. By developing a flexible program, you will have a dynamic integrated waste management system in place which will meet your goals into the future.

For assistance in developing a district-wide waste prevention program, contact the California Integrated Waste Management Board's **Office of Local Assistance** at **(916) 341-6199.**

This list of waste prevention and **recycled-content product purchasing** ideas from other schools is intended to help you jump-start your waste prevention efforts. Brainstorming with others is bound to result in more ideas!

You may have tried some of the ideas below in the past and suppliers were unwilling to provide less wasteful goods with **minimal packaging**. Slowly, more and more suppliers are changing. Keep asking and eventually you will get what you want!

- Seek minimal waste products.
- Buy equipment that is well built and easy to repair. Look for **long warranties** and readily available repair services. Consider the total cost of a product, including the cost of maintaining it.

- Purchase copiers and printers that make **two-sided copies** effectively. Maintain these machines on a regular basis to reduce paper jams.
- Purchase rebuilt or **refilled toner cartridges**. These generally are much less expensive than new ones. Check with several vendors because quality varies.
- Purchase fax machines that use plain paper.
- Purchase printers that do not discharge unused sheets of paper. If your current printers discharge unused paper, check the manual to see if it can be programmed not to do so. Another option is to **save** the unused sheets for classroom use.
- Purchase products that don't need batteries or that use solar energy (e.g., solar powered calculators). Alternatively, use rechargeable batteries.

REUSE

- Purchase refillable products, e.g., pens, pencils.
- Purchase reusable air filters. Some have a disposable filter insert, while others are completely **reusable**, but must be cleaned. Some schools have a commercial filter service that replaces inserts on schedule.
- Purchase **longer-lasting** light bulbs. Incandescent light sockets in exit signs can be converted to fluorescent. Check out availability of rebates from your electric company.
- Purchase products with no packaging, **less packaging**, or **reusable packaging**. Look for products in concentrate or bulk form.
- Ask vendors to sell products that are more durable, reusable, **repairable, and recyclable**. Also, ask suppliers not to overpackage orders. (You may have to keep asking over and over!)

- Request that deliveries be shipped in returnable containers, if possible. Or ask vendors to take back packaging. In some cases they may be able to **reuse** it.
- Save and reuse **packaging** materials. Offer excess packaging materials to firms that may be able to use it (e.g., firms providing mail services).
- Purchase products that contain recycled material.
- Use **recycled paint** when appropriate (it may be available free or at a **low cost** through your county's Household Hazardous Waste Program or CALMAX, the State of California's material exchange program. For CalMAX information: www.ciwmb.ca.gov/CalMAX/.

# Resolution

*Commending*

Bakersfield City School District

**WHEREAS,** the district recognizes the need to cost effectively recycle materials it uses, and

**WHEREAS,** vendor support is necessary to promote efficient recycling and marketing of recycled products, and

**WHEREAS,** recycling is necessary to reduce the load on landfill capacity, and

**WHEREAS,** paper and food service disposables are prime candidates for recycling, and

**WHEREAS,** district staff should serve as a positive role model concerning environmental issues,



**THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED, THAT** the Bakersfield City School District promote and implement recycling of paper and food service disposables used in district programs, and

**THAT** the district secure cooperation from local and state agencies, public and private, to implement cost effective recycling, and

**THAT** the district purchase recycled materials whenever practical, and

**THAT** the district encourage student participation in recycling through appropriate activities and instructional programs.

ADOPTED MARCH 27,1990

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Governor

Winston H. Hickox
Secretary, California Environmental Protection Agency

California Environmental Protection Agency
Integrated Waste Management Board

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IS
NOT
ENOUGH

REUSABLE
RECYCLABLE
DURABLE
REPAIRABLE
LESS PACKA