

# International Green Purchasing: Lessons From Overseas

By Scot Case

Around the world, government purchasers are using their purchasing power to minimize the adverse human health and other environmental effects of poorly designed and manufactured products.

Increasingly purchasers throughout Europe, Asia, Australia, and the United States, recognize that buying well designed, high quality products means ensuring that the products are not harming human health either directly through their emissions or indirectly through harm to the broader environment.

Like their U.S. counterparts, government purchasers in other parts of the world are buying cleaning products that do not contain cancer-causing ingredients. They are specifying paints, carpeting, and other building materials that do not emit fumes harmful to building occupants. They are requiring recycled-content paper that is manufactured without the use of chlorine or chlorine derivatives. Purchasers are ordering hybrid-electric and other highly fuel-efficient fleet vehicles. They are seeking highly energy-efficient computers, copiers, and other office equipment made with less hazardous materials, that can be easily upgraded, and then recycled after their useful life.

There are a number of international and multinational efforts underway to make it easier for purchasers to buy more environmentally preferable products. This article highlights a few recent international green purchasing developments.

## Japan



In October 2004, the City of Sendai, Japan, hosted more than 50 presenters and 1,000 delegates from 37 countries at what was billed as the First International Conference on Green Purchasing. At the conclusion of the event, conference delegates endorsed the Sendai Declaration on Green Purchasing. The three-page declaration emphasizes the importance of using purchasing power to create markets for less polluting products from less polluting companies. It also specifically encourages public purchasers around the world to implement green purchasing programs.

In addition, the Sendai Declaration formally launched the International Green Purchasing Network, which will help increase communication and collaboration among the growing numbers of environmental

purchasing practitioners and advocacy groups. The conference Web site, [www.govinfo.bz/4356-263](http://www.govinfo.bz/4356-263), includes the Sendai Declaration and copies of all the presentations.

Even prior to the conference, Japan was widely regarded as having one of the most significant and increasingly influential green purchasing efforts. The country's Green Purchasing Network (GPN), founded in 1996, has grown to almost 3,000 member institutions, including all of the Japanese prefectural (state) governments, the largest municipal governments (e.g., Tokyo), and most major corporations such as NEC, Panasonic, Sony, Fuji Xerox, Toyota, Honda, Canon, Japan IBM, Nissan, and Mitsubishi.

Like similar organizations in other parts of the world, the Japanese GPN has developed a series of purchasing guidelines for a variety of product types. It has also developed a database with product information on more than 10,000 products from approximately 600 companies. Additional information is available on the GPN Web site, [www.govinfo.bz/4356-260](http://www.govinfo.bz/4356-260), although only limited information is currently available in English.

The influence of the GPN helped Japan to pass the 2001 Law on Promoting Green Purchasing, which requires public purchasers to implement green purchasing activities. Thanks in part to the work of GPN and the resulting legislation, 83 percent of public- and private-sector organizations throughout Japan, including both GPN members and nonmembers, are actively expanding their green purchasing efforts.



## Australia

Australia also hosted a conference to further expand its green purchasing efforts. One of the highlights of the November 2004 conference was the announcement by the Australian ECO-Buy program that it was expanding its services beyond Victoria, one of the seven Australian states, to include the entire country and nearby New Zealand.

The ECO-Buy program has been extremely successful at attracting the support of local governments and at expanding their purchases of recycled-content and other environmentally preferable products. Membership requires governments to complete the following activities:

- Sign a resolution or memorandum of understanding

with the network

- ④ Nominate a point person to serve as a liaison with the network
- ④ Establish a green purchasing work group
- ④ Develop a purchasing policy
- ④ Create an action plan to implement the policy
- ④ Track green purchasing efforts
- ④ Complete an annual survey.

ECO-Buy currently includes 59 government councils (74 percent of Victorian councils), which represent 4.3 million people (88 percent of Victoria's population). It has also helped increase green purchasing expenditures from \$5.9 million (\$4.6 million USD) in 2001 to \$33.5 million (\$26 million USD) in 2003. To recognize these accomplishments, the United Nations (UN) awarded the program the 2004 World Environment Day Local Governments Award.

In addition to expanding the geographic scope of the program to include all of Australia and nearby New Zealand, the ECO-Buy program is incorporating additional incentives into the program. It is currently negotiating with manufacturers and vendors, who can participate in the program as associate members, to provide ECO-Buy members with negotiated discounts on their environmentally preferable products. This benefits both the government purchasers and the suppliers by providing discounts to the buyers and increased market access to the suppliers. The ECO-Buy program is also expanding the number of products contained within its on-line database and increasing the number of recommended purchasing specifications to make it easier for members to locate safer products. For additional information, visit: [www.govinfo.bz/4356-256](http://www.govinfo.bz/4356-256).

## Europe



Green! A Handbook on Environmental Public Procurement," which

At the end of August 2004, the European Commission released "Buying

provides clear guidance on how European government purchasers can incorporate environmental considerations into their purchasing decisions. Many European countries have had active environmental purchasing programs for more than a decade.

The increased cooperation across all governmental activities required by the European Union (EU) introduced some confusion around the multiple green purchasing requirements and made it necessary for the European Commission, the EU's executive body, to issue its formal green purchasing guidelines.

The 38-page document provides clear guidance for incorporating environmental considerations into each phase of the purchasing process. It also provides clear examples of what is and is not permitted under European purchasing law. The guidance covers:

- ④ Identifying purchasing needs
- ④ Preparing technical specifications
- ④ Developing selection criteria
- ④ Establishing award criteria
- ④ Using contract performance clauses.

While the document references European laws and court decisions, it describes a process remarkably consistent with the procedures used by the most successful U.S. green purchasing programs. The European guidance could be extremely useful for U.S. policy makers and purchasers interested in expanding local green purchasing initiatives. Copies of the guidance are available at [www.govinfo.bz/4356-257](http://www.govinfo.bz/4356-257).

The European Commission also prepared a database with purchasing information for more than 100 product categories. The information in-

cludes general recommendations, product specifications, and eco-label information. Access the database at [www.govinfo.bz/4356-258](http://www.govinfo.bz/4356-258).

## An International Snapshot of the Green Purchasing Movement

There are thousands of green purchasing efforts around the world. In addition to the ones described above, the following multinational efforts deserve a brief mention because they are making it easier for government purchasers and other government officials to launch or expand green purchasing programs.

### *North American Green Purchasing Initiative—*

NAGPI is a group of environmental non-profits, environmental standard-setting organizations, manufacturers, and purchasing officials interested in further expanding "green" purchasing throughout North America.

The organization recently launched a series of working groups to facilitate purchases of cleaning products, office supplies, and green electricity. Earlier this fall, NAGPI also released ECO-SAT, an environmental purchasing self-assessment tool that can be used by organizations to compare their environmental purchasing efforts with others. Copies of the tool are available at [www.govinfo.bz/4356-261](http://www.govinfo.bz/4356-261).

### *World Summit on Sustainable Development—*

One of the outcomes of the December 2002 "Earth Summit" held in Johannesburg, South Africa, was a document encouraging "relevant authorities at all levels...[to]...promote public procurement policies that encourage development and diffusion of environmentally sound goods and services."

This declaration has been used



*Scot Case is the Director of Procurement Strategies at the Center for a New American Dream.*

by government purchasers worldwide as a justification to promote the broader adoption of environmental purchasing principles. The declaration is available at [www.govinfo.bz/4356-265](http://www.govinfo.bz/4356-265).

### **Organization for Economic Co-Operation and Development—**

The OECD includes 30 member countries, including the United States, who work together promoting democracy and the market economy. It is particularly well respected for its research and the help it provides policy makers in understanding emerging economic issues.

Environmental purchasing is one emerging issue for which OECD issued a set of specific recommendations in January 2002. OECD recommends “that Member countries take greater account of environmental considerations in public procurement of products and services...in order to improve the environmental performance of public procurement, and thereby promote continuous improvement in the environmental performance of products and services.”

It also recommends specific actions, including devising appropriate environmental purchasing policies and procedures, developing and disseminating environmental purchasing tools, and tracking environmental purchasing efforts. A copy of the recommendations is available at [www.govinfo.bz/4356-262](http://www.govinfo.bz/4356-262).

### **Interagency Sustainable Procurement Group—**

Founded in December 2001 by the World Bank and other multilateral development banks, a variety of nonprofit organizations, the United Nations (UN) and other UN affiliated organizations, the Interagency Sustainable Procurement Group works to identify environmental purchasing opportunities for its members.

One result of its efforts is a database with more than 200 sites providing information on environmentally preferable purchasing and purchasing criteria from international, regional, and local sources.

The group’s database is available at [www.govinfo.bz/4356-259](http://www.govinfo.bz/4356-259).

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency operates a similar database at [www.govinfo.bz/4356-264](http://www.govinfo.bz/4356-264).

### **The Future of Government Purchasing**

When asked to comment about life in the future, William Gibson, an award winning science fiction writer, shared the following observation, “The future is already here. It is just not evenly distributed.” In explaining this statement, he noted that computers were once limited to a very few specialized uses, but now they are much more evenly distributed throughout society. In many countries, almost everyone relies on computers for some part of their daily life. Gibson also pointed to DVD players, which were once affordable to only the wealthiest consumers. They are now widely available and affordable. Some people even consider them a necessity.

Environmental purchasing appears to be on a similar path. Twenty years ago only a handful of isolated government purchasers around the world were aware of the connection between purchasing decisions and human health and other related environmental considerations. Over the past two decades, more and more purchasers have recognized the links. Buying recycled content, energy-efficient, and water-efficient products rose in importance in countries around the world almost simultaneously. Manufacturers responded by making these products more widely available. Gradually purchasers are beginning to examine toxicity and the hazardous content of products as part of routine purchasing decisions. Again, manufacturers are responding.

Given the increased global cooperation among government purchasers, other supply chain managers, manufacturers, and environmental advocates, it appears likely that green purchasing will become a routine part of government purchasing. Perhaps Gibson is correct. The future is already here. It is just not evenly distributed—yet. □

**Editor’s Note:** Scot Case is the Director of Procurement Strategies at the Center for a New American Dream where he helps institutional purchasers buy less polluting products from less polluting companies. For additional information, visit [www.govinfo.bz/4356-255](http://www.govinfo.bz/4356-255) or e-mail Scot at [scot@newdream.org](mailto:scot@newdream.org).



## **PRO PATHWAYS**

*Center for a New American Dream, [www.govinfo.bz/4356-255](http://www.govinfo.bz/4356-255), includes a list of “approved” cleaning chemicals and the purchasing criteria developed by a nationwide group of purchasers.*

*Australia’s ECO-Buy program – [www.govinfo.bz/4356-256](http://www.govinfo.bz/4356-256)*

*European Union’s “Buying Green! A Handbook on Environmental Public Procurement,” – [www.govinfo.bz/4356-257](http://www.govinfo.bz/4356-257)*

*European Union Product Database – [www.govinfo.bz/4356-258](http://www.govinfo.bz/4356-258)*

*Interagency Sustainable Procurement Group Product Database – [www.govinfo.bz/4356-259](http://www.govinfo.bz/4356-259)*

*Japan’s Green Purchasing Network (GPN) – [www.govinfo.bz/4356-260](http://www.govinfo.bz/4356-260)*

*North American Green Purchasing Initiative – [www.govinfo.bz/4356-261](http://www.govinfo.bz/4356-261)*

*Organization for Economic Co-Operation and Development – [www.govinfo.bz/4356-262](http://www.govinfo.bz/4356-262)*

*Sendai, Japan, First International Green Purchasing Conference – [www.govinfo.bz/4356-263](http://www.govinfo.bz/4356-263)*

*U.S. Environmental Protection Agency Product Database – [www.govinfo.bz/4356-264](http://www.govinfo.bz/4356-264)*

*World Summit on Sustainable Development Declaration – [www.govinfo.bz/4356-265](http://www.govinfo.bz/4356-265)*