

Frequently Asked Questions

Buying Green! A Guide to Purchasing Environmentally Preferable Products

1. What is green procurement?

Green procurement is about selecting products and services with environmental attributes that minimize the environmental impact of government's activities and maximize the resource efficiency of the goods and services procured. It also has a number of benefits including, for example, reducing negative impacts on the environment, mitigating negative impacts on health and safety, and helping government realize potential financial savings.

2. What is the purpose of the green procurement guide – Buying Green! A Guide to Purchasing Environmentally Preferable Products?

The purpose of the Guide is to promote greater understanding of green procurement practices and provide staff in core government departments with the tools to incorporate 'green' into procurement, whether this is for low dollar value purchases, tenders or RFPs.

The Guide includes:

- What green procurement is and why it is important
- The myths associated with green procurement
- Case studies, examples and tips from NL and other jurisdictions
- Information on eco-labels and how to navigate environmental claims of suppliers
- 15 factsheets that provide environmental information on products and services commonly purchased by government
- Green terminology

3. Why is this Guide needed?

In 2011, the Government of Newfoundland and Labrador released the Climate Change and Energy Efficiency Action Plans which committed to “explore the potential to utilize the government's procurement power to promote greater energy efficiency, lower GHG emissions and reduce waste”.

One of the areas in which governments can lead by example is procurement, by making decisions that are both environmentally sound and economically prudent. Determining how best to reflect environmental considerations into tender specifications or requests for proposals may not always be straightforward or obvious to those who have no experience or background in this area. Guidance is therefore needed to assist those responsible for the selection and acquisition of products and services to determine how best to incorporate environmental considerations during the procurement process in both a clear and transparent manner.

In 2012-13, the Government of Newfoundland and Labrador purchased over \$2 billion in goods and services. By developing environmental guidelines to inform procurement processes, government aims to promote greater understanding and application of good practice and more consistency of approach.

4. Who developed the Guide?

The Guide was developed by Reeve Consulting Inc. and MHPM for the Government of Newfoundland and Labrador in cooperation with the Government Purchasing Agency (GPA) and the Office of Climate Change and Energy Efficiency (CCEE).

5. Who is the audience for the Guide and how will the Guide work?

This Guide will provide staff in core government departments with the tools to incorporate 'green' into procurement, whether this is for low dollar value purchases, tenders or RFPs. Although core government is the target audience for this guide, government funded bodies may also find it useful.

Incorporating 'green' into government purchases is not mandatory, but it is good practice and demonstrates government leadership. Staff in all departments will be made aware of the Guide, and information sessions have been, and will continue to be, made available to staff so they can learn more about the Guide and its utility.

6. Were stakeholders consulted during the development of the Guide?

The development of the Guide involved three rounds of engagement sessions with interested stakeholders. These break down as follows:

- In December, the consultants held a number of sessions with internal and external stakeholders to gather views on what should be included in the Guide. This included core government, GFBs and suppliers/business associations.
- In February, the consultants held user group sessions to test the content and layout of the draft guide, which included core government and GFBs.
- At the end of March, the consultants held four information sessions to provide an overview of the Guide and offer practical steps and tools to assist staff in incorporating 'green' into their purchasing. One of these sessions was designated for businesses and suppliers, while the other three were targeted at core government and GFBs. Over 100 people participated in these four sessions.

7. What is the financial impact of incorporating green considerations into the procurement of goods and services?

Government seeks to procure goods in a way that is financially responsible and secures best value for money for the taxpayer. Better appreciation of the life cycle costs of running and maintaining equipment and buildings, in addition to the upfront cost, is fiscally prudent and environmentally sound. For example, specifications promoting more energy efficient buildings will reduce annual operating costs associated with heating and lighting over a building's lifetime, which could be 40 years or longer. It is also incumbent on government to act responsibly and in citizen's best interests. For example, it may be desirable to purchase non-toxic products (e.g. low-VOC paints) to improve indoor air quality to protect employee health, or to purchase low-water fixtures (such as low-flush toilets) to conserve water resources and demonstrate leadership to wider society.

8. Shouldn't government already be incorporating green practices into its procurement practices?

Government already procures goods and services to take account of minimum standards. This is about going beyond minimum requirements to demonstrate leadership to make each dollar of taxpayers' money work harder by delivering outcomes that are more environmentally sound and economically prudent.

9. Is green procurement a government policy? Will it become a policy?

Green procurement is not a government policy. However, in its 2011 Climate Change and Energy Efficiency Action Plans, Government committed to exploring the potential to utilize its procurement power to promote greater energy efficiency, lower GHG emissions and reduce waste. This Guide – *Buying Green! A Guide to Environmentally Preferable Products* – will provide practical guidance and advice to core government staff on how to incorporate environmental considerations into public procurement practices in a clear and transparent manner.

10. How does this Guide relate to the Public Tender Act?

The acquisition of goods and services are procured in accordance with the Public Tender Act. The procurement process will remain the same however; the guide will aid users in incorporating 'green' into procurement opportunities and developing 'green' requirements and specifications for products and services.

11. How does this Guide relate to the new procurement legislation?

The content of the Guide has been designed to be compatible with both current and future legislation which may come into effect. The purpose of the Guide is to ensure that government is delivering optimal economic and environmental outcomes that are consistent with government policy and legislation, whatever that legislative framework is.

12. How will the Guide impact businesses and current suppliers? If businesses cannot supply 'green' goods and services, will they still be able to bid on government contracts?

The Guide is not meant to demonstrate a preference towards a certain supplier and it is not meant to exclude companies from bidding on government contracts. The Guide is simply a tool to assist departmental staff in incorporating environmental considerations into its purchasing decisions. Tenders and RFPs will continue to clearly state specifications, some of which may include 'green' criteria. As a bidder, a supplier will need to demonstrate that they can meet these criteria.

13. Will a list of companies that provide ‘green’ products and services be developed and provided to departments and agencies?

No, this is beyond the scope of this Guide. Furthermore, the Guide is not meant to direct departmental staff to particular products, services or suppliers. It is simply meant to provide staff with knowledge of product and service categories and commonly referenced eco-labels so they can better understand and incorporate green criteria into the development and evaluation of low dollar value purchases, tenders and RFPs. It is also through this process that departments will gain a better understanding of what green products and services are available in the local market.

14. Will the Guide be made more widely available?

The Guide has been developed to help support those undertaking procurement using public funds. As such, it reflects the requirements governing public procurement and the need for transparency, accountability, clarity, and fairness. The plan is to make it widely available to further improve how government procures and ensure consistency of approach. The Guide will be a model of good practice and, if it can help other non-government groups reflect on and improve their procurement processes that would be an added bonus.

15. Where can I get a copy of the Guide?

The Guide is available electronically through GPA’s and CCEE’s corporate websites, as well as the Turn Back the Tide website.

16. Will further information or training be provided to potential users and/or suppliers?

Over the coming months, as the Guide is rolled out, a series of training sessions and/or webinars will be held, so there will be opportunities for stakeholders to learn more about the Guide, including what it contains and how it can be used in the development and evaluation of low dollar value purchases, tenders and RFPs. CCEE and GPA staff will also look for presentation opportunities and speaking events, as well as other mechanisms to increase awareness of the Guide and disseminate the information it contains.

17. What are the plans for promoting and maintaining the Guide?

Moving forward, GPA will have ownership of the Guide, with support from CCEE. Over the next year, GPA and CCEE will work to raise awareness of green procurement and road test the Guide with users. This will involve presentations to potential user groups or interested stakeholders, as well as webinars and training sessions.

The goal is to build on the network of potential users and interested stakeholders that have been engaged thus far, encourage them to use the Guide and build on examples of successful green procurement to create a repository of useful tips and information.