



## **10-Step Guide to Environmentally Preferable Purchasing (EPP)**

Addressing potential environmental problems and costs before products and service providers come in the door can save money and headaches later on. Many health care organizations have found that working with suppliers has been a crucial contributor to achieving environmental goals such as mercury elimination, energy use reduction, or proper waste segregation.

You don't need an "Environmental Purchasing Program" or even an environmental policy to get started with environmentally preferable purchasing, but many Practice Greenhealth members have found these ten steps to be a helpful guide when starting to use contracting and procurement activities to prevent environmental problems and costs.

### **Step 1: Obtain Management Support**

While it is not necessary to obtain top management support to implement EPP, an environmental policy can provide an opportunity to identify environmental goals and responsibilities. Other forms of management support such as integrating sustainability responsibilities into job descriptions may be necessary before procurement staff are able to put any time into implementing EPP. See [Practicegreenhealth.org](http://Practicegreenhealth.org) for EPP Policy examples.

### **Step 2: Establish an EPP Team**

An EPP team is comprised of hospital professionals from different areas working together to consider and prioritize the use of products that improve environmental performance and occupational health and safety. This team coordinates its activities with the facility-wide environmental team and the product review committee(s). The leader of the team should be someone whose administrative responsibilities include ensuring that the EPP Project is fully implemented.

Establishing a separate committee is not the only way to go – some hospitals may find that their existing product review committee or system-wide Green Team is the best place to coordinate environmental purchasing initiatives.

## Step 3: Establish EPP Program Goals

Set EPP goals with your facility's existing environmental or safety goals in mind. Using purchasing changes to address existing environmental or occupational health issues creates buy-in and practical results.

You will want to establish goals that can be measured and include a deadline – for example, “Replace all B5 solution with mercury-free alternative by December, 2009” provides a specific measure (all B5 solution) and a deadline. Measurable goals allow you to evaluate what the specific costs, savings and environmental outcomes of such a change will be. They also help you recognize success when you achieve it!

## Step 4: Designate Responsibility

How many of us have sat in a meeting where a decision was made, but then three months later we realize everyone thought someone else was responsible for implementing it? Designate responsible staff members for achieving EPP goals. Write down who will be responsible for determining the steps that must be taken to reach that goal, and who will be responsible for taking those steps. Set up a timeline for report-backs to the EPP Team. With management support, achieving EPP goals can be incorporated into job descriptions or personal goals of particular staff members.

## Step 5: Prioritize Next Steps

Depending on your institution, next steps may vary. The individuals responsible for achieving the goals may want to:

- *Contact your Group Purchasing Organization (GPO)* to determine how to take advantage of the environmentally preferable products already available through your GPO contracts. Many GPOs provide EPP product lists or contract search capabilities to help you find mercury-free products or other products that can contribute to your environmental goals.
- *Review purchasing specifications available from Practice Greenhealth.* See [www.PracticeGreenhealth.org](http://www.PracticeGreenhealth.org) for specifications and RFI/RFP questions that can help you identify environmentally preferable products from vendors bidding on contracts. You can also send those specifications or questions to your current vendors, asking them to identify products they supply that meet those environmental criteria.
- *Talk with your current vendors.* Many suppliers, when asked what they can do to help you achieve your environmental goals, will be happy to explain to you what they can do and what they offer. Make sure they provide you with quantitative and specific information about the environmental benefits they offer.

Vendors of environmentally preferable alternatives should be able to provide you with information on the products' specific environmental benefits for tracking purposes. This information is essential to demonstrate the benefit of your purchasing changes. For example, a vendor of chlorine free recycled paper should be able to provide you with figures for how much

virgin pulp is avoided, how many gallons of toxic chemicals are not released, how much landfill space is preserved and how much energy is saved per ream. In addition, your supplier should be able to provide a quarterly or annual report indicating the environmentally preferable products you purchased over that time period.

## **Step 6: Consider Pilot Projects**

In cases where a new product requires work practice change, a pilot project can provide the feedback and follow up needed to ensure a smooth transition to the rest of the facility.

For example, changing from mercury fixative to non-mercury in the histology lab may require the lab to do a pilot where they compare slides of the same sample using each fixative side-by-side for a few months to ensure that the pathology staff understands what changes in the appearance in the tissue is due to the change in fixative.

Involve end-users in designing and implementing the project, and enlist vendors in providing training, troubleshooting and other assistance during the pilot, and evaluate these services as part of the pilot. Make sure your pilot has a defined time frame and a mechanism for collecting feedback from end-users.

## **Step 7: Continuous Quality Improvement**

To keep on top of both the benefits and the potential negatives of new products as you move into the broader implementation phase, you will want to establish assessment mechanisms. Pre- and post-implementation surveys may be helpful. In addition, you will want to track acceptance of products, any cost savings related to purchasing, use or disposal, and environmental benefits related to use of the new products.

## **Step 8: Expand your efforts**

Once you have achieved your initial goals, consider how you can build on those successes. If you have gotten a few vendors to provide you with environmental benefits reporting, consider how to expand that program to include additional suppliers. If water use has been reduced through the installation of water-saving shower heads, consider how the savings can be used to fund the purchase additional water-saving fixtures such as toilets.

## **Step 9: Communicate and Celebrate Success**

Make sure facility staff, patients and administrators know about the success of your efforts! Place general articles on the benefits of EPP in employee newsletters, intranet and email communications. Highlight successful pilot or implementation efforts, naming staff who participated and quantifying the environmental benefits of the changes.

Work with your public affairs department to inform your community media about your efforts and successes. Environmental improvements, particularly those that improve indoor air quality, minimize the use of toxic chemicals and reduce energy and water consumption, are clearly part of the story of how your hospital cares for your patients, staff and community.

## **Step 10: Apply for a Practice Greenhealth Award**

Don't forget to apply for environmental awards! Practice Greenhealth members can apply annually for the Practice Greenhealth Award at [www.practicegreenhealth.org/awards](http://www.practicegreenhealth.org/awards). If your project focuses on energy or water conservation, you may qualify for the EPA's Energy Star award (<http://www.energystar.gov>) or Water Efficiency Leader Awards (<http://www.epa.gov/water/wel/>). Awards can increase your profile in the community, increase the pride of all staff in the facility, and get your work noticed by top management.

*Practice Greenhealth thanks its EPP Supporters for their contributions to the creation of this resource.*

