



Oregon
Environmental
Council
It's Your Oregon

Founded in 1968, Oregon Environmental Council (OEC) is a statewide nonprofit dedicated to advancing innovative, collaborative solutions to Oregon's environmental challenges for today and future generations.

The Advantages of Healthy Purchasing



We lack basic information about hazards

Right now, we know very little about what chemicals are in the goods and services we use. In most cases, our current laws don't require this type of information to be shared with the public. Of the approximately 143,000 chemicals used in commerce globally, the federal government has only required health and safety testing on a few hundred of them.^{1,2,3} This lack of information means we can't identify threats to public health and the environment.

Unnecessary risk and liability

By encouraging the disclosure of chemical hazards in the goods and services you purchase, you're protecting the health of your employees, the public, and the environment while reducing your own risk. In our information-rich world, risk is more than potential financial liability—it also includes potential damage to public confidence and trust in your organization and brand. You can help reduce your exposure to these risks by taking steps to protect people with a healthy purchasing policy.

There is reasonable cause for concern

Our workers and communities don't have adequate protection from hazardous chemicals because of major gaps in our current federal and state laws. For example, flame retardants that impact our behavior, learning, and memory exist in furniture.⁴ Many plastics contain chemicals called phthalates that mimic our hormones and can impact our ability to develop normally and reproduce.⁵ It is up to individual organizations, including local governments and businesses, to take reasonable action to identify and prevent the presence of these harmful chemicals.

Your purchasing decisions really matter

State and local governments across the U.S. spend about \$1.5 trillion annually on goods, supplies, equipment, services, and construction. Every purchase made by your organization, or on your behalf, has the power to influence the marketplace. You can play a crucial role by stimulating demand for safer, less hazardous products for our communities.

Healthy purchasing at work

In the building and construction industry, manufacturers and non-profits created a "health product declaration" to help share information about chemicals used in products. The result is greater transparency and accountability in the market, helping architects, designers, developers, and contractors meet emerging green building standards.

Acting responsibly and with transparency

We can help prevent Oregonians' exposure to hazardous chemicals by making smart changes to our purchasing policies and practices. For example, Multnomah County is integrating a chemical ingredient hazard disclosure provision into specific contracting processes. Encouraging this type of information sharing between purchasers and manufacturers embodies some of your key values:

- **Responsible:** Protects workers, public health, and the environment while reducing hazardous waste generation and future liability.
- **Effective:** Creates shared responsibility with business partners through a fair and consistent system.
- **Transparent:** Helps level the playing field for innovative businesses by encouraging transparency in the market place, protecting your reputation and integrity.

Getting the best value

Every purchase you make is an opportunity to get the best value for your money. In addition to price and performance, safety is important as well. You can demand safer products by incorporating healthy purchasing criteria into procurement decisions. Doing so will help establish clear and predictable standards for your business partners, while allowing you to get the best value for your money.

Examples of healthy purchasing provisions include:

- Establishing priority product and service categories where concern about chemical hazards are highest
- Adding information sharing requirements to public purchasing proposals and contracts

Footnotes

1. Wilson MP, Schwarzman MR. (2009). Toward a New U.S. Chemicals Policy: Rebuilding the Foundation to Advance New Science, Green Chemistry, and Environmental Health. *Environ Health Perspectives* 117(8): doi:10.1289/ehp.0800404
2. United Nations Environment Programme. (2012). Global Chemicals Outlook: Towards Sound Management of Chemicals. United Nations Environment Programme. Retrieved on 10/8/12 from http://www.unep.org/pdf/GCO_Synthesis%20Report_CBDTIE_UNEP_September5_2012.pdf.
3. United States Government Accountability Office. (2005). Chemical Regulation: Options Exist to Improve EPA's Ability to Assess Health Risks and Manage its Chemical Review Program (GAO-05-458). Retrieved on 10/10/12 from <http://www.gao.gov/new.items/d05458.pdf>
4. United States Department of Health and Human Services (2004). Toxicological Profile for Polybrominated Biphenyls and Polybrominated Diphenyl Ethers. Retrieved on 7/25/12 from <http://www.atsdr.cdc.gov>.
5. United States Department of Health and Human Services. (2004). Toxicological Profile for Di(2-ethylhexyl)phthalate (DEHP). Retrieved on 7/25/12 from <http://www.atsdr.cdc.gov>.



At Multnomah County, we look for innovative ways to use our purchasing power for the good of the community. With the Healthy Purchasing Initiative, the county will increase transparency about what is in the products we buy."

Chair Jeff Cogen, Multnomah County

- Creating opportunities for vendors and manufacturers to share the responsibility for identifying less hazardous products
- Allocating a percentage of scoring criteria to proposal evaluation that corresponds to chemical hazard disclosure and assessment

For more information:



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