Buying Green: Considerations for public purchasers on the environmentally friendly procurement of paper

The European Commission has adopted a non-binding guidance document on green public procurement1. The paper industry recognises the underlying aim of the handbook to bring more clarity to this often-controversial area. The paper industry also acknowledges the aim of the Commission developed web-based database on environmental product criteria, to provide corporate and public purchasers with background information on the criteria relevant to a particular product2.

The paper industry would like to direct public purchasers of paper to the following five essential steps to the green procurement of paper. The steps have been compiled by the European paper industry with the help of industries from the paper converting, printing and publishing sectors.

1. Look for the environmental management system: It shows that the paper producer considers the environment, acts to reduce negative environmental impacts, and is continuously improving its environmental performance, resulting in a product with lower environmental impact.

2. Ask for open and transparent reporting: It is the best way to get to know more about the product and its production. Environmental product declarations as well as sustainable development and environmental reports are good sources, among others, to help you in this.

3. Ensure that virgin fibres come from forests managed in a sustainable fashion: Forest certification is one way to prove this, but as only 5% of the world’s forests are certified today, it cannot be regarded as the sole means of assuring sustainable forest management. Ask your supplier about the traceability systems they have in place to show the origin of wood.

4. Acknowledge the renewability, recyclability and safety of paper and board products to ensure sustainability in the long run: For example, do not demand reusable packaging regardless of the environmental justifiability.

5. Make sure that the paper products you order and generate (e.g. through copying machines and printers) are recyclable where appropriate and that used paper is collected properly3. Used paper that is recyclable and collected properly will be recycled. Recycled content is not necessarily a good measure of environmental performance. Requiring a high percentage recycled content in paper will not increase paper recycling – it will only lead to additional transportation of recovered and/or recycled paper, thus be counterproductive to environmental aims and should be avoided.

For more information visit www.cepi.org and www.paperprofile.org

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1 Commission staff working document: Buying green! A handbook on environmental public procurement
2 http://europa.eu.int/comm/environment/green_purchasing
3 About 19.5% of paper products cannot be collected and/or recycled for technical reasons (tissue papers, coffee filters, wall papers, etc.)