



Pick your policy... take aim...go "green"!

by José Carlos Fernandez Ugalde

HOW DO YOU PICTURE buying green: easy, or difficult? For instance, picture a savvy professional procurement officer choosing a "green" product from a list of alternatives. Simple right? But there are three reasons why it is not so simple. First, the product you might have selected as an example will most likely be improved in the future and replaced by more environmentally preferable options, blurring our picture. Second, sometimes the greenest option is simply not to purchase something. Finally, our picture tells us little about the information and reasoning behind the purchaser's choice. Environmental purchasing is a *process*, not a simple act and, as such, it is difficult to capture in a single picture. Environmental purchasing results from a set of policies and procedures and uses tools that allow an organization to make the most efficient use of materials, produce a minimum of waste and pollution, and stimulate the use of post-consumer material.

An organization that incorporates green purchasing practices as part of its mainstream activities is aiming at a moving target – the evolving green products market. But, if well equipped with updated tools, it is better able to identify opportunities for improvement. Initially, green products tended to be expensive but market growth, along with new technologies, is making them more affordable. As well, changes in processes and production lines within the organization may open opportunities for improvement, affecting its purchasing needs. Unless a policy for continued green purchasing is in place, there is much less chance that the organization will take advantage of these opportunities. So how do you assess the readiness of your organization's green purchasing policies and procedures?

The North American Green Purchasing Initiative (NAGPI), with the support of the Commission for Environmental Cooperation, has developed a tool to help professional purchasers accomplish this: the North American Green Purchasing Initiative's Self-Assessment Tool, or Eco-Eval for short (formerly known as Eco-Sat).

Eco-Eval can be used by any organization with a structured purchasing system, including all levels of government (national, provincial/state and municipal levels), hospitals, schools, universities, and large corporations. Purchasers can also share this tool with their suppliers to help them anticipate possible future needs. The tool is not limited to any specific product group and will apply to any commodity purchased, including services.

In 2006, the procurement office for the Province of Quebec, the *Centre de services partagés du Québec* (CSPQ), used the tool to evaluate its green procurement practices. A working committee was established and Léandre A. Morin, P.E., led the writing of the report with the assistance of Pascale Tremblay, a trainee from the *Université de Sherbrooke*. Using the former Eco-Eval platform as the basis for their work, the CSPQ was able to compare its 2006 results and draw up goals for 2008. According to the report, the tool allowed the CSPQ to successfully evaluate its green purchasing initiatives, assess the level

of progress and efficiency of its green purchasing strategy, analyze the process of sustainable purchasing of goods and services, and identify possible areas of improvement for the future.

For the CSPQ, the tool proved sufficiently flexible to allow its questions to be tailored to the reality of the organization. Tremblay and Morin concluded that it was "an excellent continuous improvement model." Eco-Eval's current online platform benefits from user feedback and allows the user to maintain an account and perform the evaluation in sections at their own pace.

Finally, this self-assessment tool could also be used to assess whether your organization's environmental purchasing practices could be certified by an independent third-party organization such as TerraChoice Marketing Services or Green Seal. Please contact them directly for more information. The tool is accessible through www.cec.org/eco-eval.

NAGPI is led by a steering committee made up of major groups and agencies working on green purchasing in North America. The CEC is an international organization created by Canada, Mexico and the United States under the North American Agreement on Environmental Cooperation. For more information, go to www.cec.org. 

José Carlos Fernandez Ugalde is a program manager at the Commission for Environmental Cooperation (CEC).