

**NYS OFFICE OF GENERAL SERVICES  
PROCUREMENT SERVICES GROUP**

**GREEN CLEANING PRODUCTS  
Frequently Asked Questions**

**What is the definition of "green" cleaning products?**

The term green cleaning is synonymous with environmentally preferred or environmentally sensitive cleaning. These terms are often used interchangeably to describe cleaning and maintenance products that minimize adverse impacts to human health and the environment and still clean effectively. The goal of using environmentally sensitive cleaning and maintenance products or "green" cleaning products is to reduce, as much as possible, exposure of children and school staff to potentially harmful chemicals and substances used in the cleaning and maintenance of school facilities. This goal must work hand in hand with the requirement that cleaning products clean effectively by ensuring the removal of soil from surfaces without damaging the surface and virtually leaving no soil or chemical residue.

**What is Environmentally Preferable Purchasing (EPP)?**

EPP is the act of purchasing products/services whose environmental impacts have been considered and found to be less damaging to the environment and human health when compared to competing products/services.

EPP also includes the gradual and ongoing process in which an agency continually refines and expands the scope of its efforts to select environmentally sound, healthy and safe products and services.

**What are the benefits of EPP?**

By carefully selecting goods and services, agencies can:

- improve significantly improve their impact on the overall quality of human health and the environment
- reduce costs due to lower overhead, avoid waste disposal, liability costs or occupational health costs
- provide a healthier environment for the public, workers and employees through cleaner and healthier facilities, reduce exposure to cleaners, solvents, paints, and other hazardous materials
- leverage positive publicity and promotion potential

## **Why is the purchasing stage so important?**

Purchasing departments are the central point for nearly every product or service procured for many entities. This makes it an effective point to apply actions to improve health and environmental impact. It is at this stage of money transfer and contract development that vendors can best be influenced.

## **Are there price and performance issues?**

Green cleaning and maintenance products can potentially be more expensive, less expensive or similarly priced in comparison to conventional products. That is why we are investigating a number of green cleaning products, so that consumers can choose green products that best suite their program. We recommend that you also become familiar with green cleaning and maintenance products and become aware of pricing disparities that may exist between products before choosing products for your program. The legislation notes that products should have the same "utility" as products currently used. That means that the products should work effectively and not cost more than their traditional replacements. A green product that costs substantially more than what is currently being used, requires more frequent use, or more effort from cleaning staff, does not have the same utility as the existing product, and therefore would not meet the intent of the legislation. We are stressing the need for a balance of cleaning efficacy, health, environmental and cost concerns in the proposed Specifications and Guidelines documents that is required by the legislation.

## **Does the Executive Order's directive to purchase green cleaning products supercede the State Finance Law requirements for competitive bidding?**

The executive order does not in any way supercede the State Finance Law's requirements for competitive bidding. As state agencies conduct purchasing under their discretionary spending limits agencies are encouraged to purchase green cleaning products. As agencies are doing competitive bids for cleaning products that are not available under OGS state contracts, state agencies are encouraged to include in their specifications, requirements for green cleaning products. There are a number of web resources available herein with recommendations for contract specifications.

## **Will there be a State Contract for "green" cleaning products?**

Currently, we are working on Proposed Guidelines and Specifications for the procurement and use of environmentally sensitive cleaning and maintenance products for all elementary and secondary schools in New York State. From this effort, we plan to create a list of sample cleaning and maintenance products for schools to use. Eventually, we will use both of these documents to develop a state contract for "green" cleaning products.

## **Where can I find successful examples of green purchasing?**

### **Government Purchasing Agencies**

#### [City of Santa Monica, California](#)

Includes a copy of Santa Monica's custodial products bid specifications, which many other purchasers have used as a basis for their own specifications.

#### [Commonwealth of Massachusetts](#)

Contains extensive details on the process Massachusetts used to identify environmentally preferable cleaning products. It includes the actual specifications, Massachusetts' environmental ratings for specific products, and product pricing information provided by the vendors.

#### [State of Minnesota](#)

Provides comprehensive information on the process Minnesota used to evaluate the environmental preferability of cleaning products. Also includes links to and information about other related resources.

#### [King County, Washington](#)

Includes excerpts from the county's 1996 environmentally preferable cleaning specifications. The site also includes links to other useful cleaning product resources.

### **Other Government Resources**

#### [Canada's Environmental Choice Program](#)

Includes a copy of the specifications for earning Environment Canada's EcoLogo for industrial and commercial cleaners.

### **International Resources**

#### [Governmental Procurement](#) Magazine

Article from the December 2004 issued includes links to numerous international resources.