

Chapter Five

Closing the Loop

1. Introduction

Buying recycled products is part of **Closing the Loop**. This step is critical because it maintains the market demand for recyclables. Without a demand for recycled products, there is no economy to support recycling. Creating stable markets for recycling ensures the continuation and expansion of recycling programs everywhere.

The most effective way to help recycling succeed is for consumers to let manufacturers and businesses know that they buy recycled products. Consumer spending makes up two-thirds of the Gross National Product. Businesses are responsive to the consumer market. They are increasingly aware of the “triple bottom line—people, planet, profits”. Consumers influence businesses by sending postcards, making phone calls, and filling out comment cards. Dolphin-free tuna and pesticide protection for grape farmers are direct results of consumer involvement.

Consumers vote with their dollars when they buy recycled. What do these purchases do?

- ◆ Create new markets. Stable markets improve revenues from recycling programs.
- ◆ Maintain the value of recyclables. Recyclers lose money when the prices for recyclables are so low that shipping costs are more than the materials are worth.
- ◆ Convince manufacturers to use more recycled materials. This increases demand for recycled products. Since investment in processing and other manufacturing equipment is expensive, producers will not spend the money unless they believe it will pay off.

2. What is a Recycled Product?

The first step in buying recycled products is to understand what they are. Currently, there is no consensus on how to define a “recycled” product, nor are there nationally accepted standards for what percentage of recovered materials

Terms introduced in this chapter include:

Recycled
 Recycled material
 Recyclable
 Recycled content
 Pre-consumer material
 Post-consumer material
 Secondary waste material
 Recovered material
 Recycled plastic
 Recycled products
 Remanufactured product
 Price preferences
 Set asides
 Cooperative purchasing
 Resource Conservation & Recovery Act
 ORS 279-545

should be used. Consumers must read labels carefully to find out if the product contains recycled material. If a label does not say the product contains recycled content it may or may not. Some materials have been recycled so long that manufacturers do not advertise the content.

A. Defining a Recycled Material

The world of recycled products is full of many claims about the materials they use. One way to analyze these claims is to be familiar with definitions. Some of these appear below. The State of Oregon has included definitions of some of the terms in its laws. (See ORS 279.545 for a complete reading. Any definition taken from that statute will have the number noted).

Recycled: a product that contains some recovered materials.

Recycled material: any material that would otherwise be a useless, unwanted, or discarded material except for the fact that the material still

has useful physical or chemical properties after serving a specific purpose and can still be reused or recycled. (ORS 279.545)

Recyclable: a product or package that can be collected, separated or recovered from the waste stream for use as a raw material in the manufacture or assembly of a new product or package. This is location specific. Check with haulers and collection sites in the local area.

Recycled content: the portion of a product or package that contains materials that have been recovered or otherwise diverted from the solid waste stream either during the manufacturing process or after consumer use. Many paper products are made with 10% recycled content.

Pre-consumer material: material such as factory trimmings, damaged or obsolete products, and overruns, which are generated by manufacturers. Such materials have been recycled for years.

Post-consumer materials: material generated by a consumer or business that has served its intended use and has been separated or diverted from solid waste for the purpose of recycling, collection and disposal. This includes used materials such as office paper, glass jars, tin cans and plastic milk jugs. Post-consumer does not include manufacturing waste.

Secondary waste materials: fragments of finished products. It can include post-consumer waste but does not include waste by-products. For paper, secondary waste materials will not include fibers recovered from wastewater, trimmings of paper machine rolls or wood residue from a manufacturing process. (ORS 279.545)

Recovered material: materials and byproducts that have been reclaimed from solid waste. Industrial scrap is not considered recovered because the materials and byproducts are commonly reused. This is a broad term, which covers both pre-consumer and post-consumer materials. (ORS 279.545)

Recycled plastic: plastics composed of recovered material. Material may be recycled, re-ground, reprocessed or reconstituted plastics. In-

dustrial scrap—what is referred to as trim or re-grind—is not considered recycled material.

Because of the circular nature of material use in recycling, many materials can be used over and over. However, recycled products, for a variety of technical reasons, may not be manufactured totally from recycled materials. This makes the process of deciphering claims even more difficult.

A common question is which product is better: one made from pre-consumer waste or one made from post-consumer waste. Recyclers often prefer products made from post-consumer waste because they are supporting community recycling programs. However, pre-consumer products also help divert waste from the manufacturing process and are good for the environment.

B. Processes that Look at Recycling Systems

Research on the recycled content of a product may lead to claims regarding the recycling processes and their environmental impacts. Two commonly used terms are: Closed loop and life-cycle analysis.

Closed loop: A product that is continually recycled into the same product, for example glass bottles into glass bottles.

Life-cycle analysis: Analyzes the total environmental impact of a specific product or product category, including energy use, air pollution, and water pollution. This analysis also looks at mining, manufacturing, transportation, use, and recycling or other disposal.

C. Oregon's Guidelines for Recycled Products

In order to further clarify the amount of post-consumer and secondary waste in a recycled product, Oregon has created some content definitions. These guidelines may help with purchasing decisions.

Remanufactured product: a product that is refurbished for reuse without substantial altera-

tion of its form. (ORS 279.545) Remanufacturing is an important way to reuse post-consumer products. Parts are disassembled, cleaned, repaired or replaced, and then reassembled to sound working condition.

Recycled products: Oregon defines recycled products as materials, goods or supplies in which at least 50 percent of the total weight of the item is made out of secondary and post-consumer waste. Also 10 percent of the item's total weight must be made from post-consumer waste. (ORS 279.545) Recycled products include remanufactured products.

Products that have a high value are likely to be remanufactured, including: motor vehicle parts, office furniture, toner cartridges, valves, medical equipment, slot machines, computers, cell phones, street lights, and parking meters.

The content requirements in Oregon for recycled paper are very specific. A recycled paper product must have at least 50% of its fiber weight consisting of secondary waste materials, or 25% of its fiber weight consisting of post-consumer waste. (ORS 279.545)

The market for recycled plastic products is still developing. Recycled PETE products (such as soft drink bottles) currently do not have specific content percentages, however they must contain post-consumer Polyethylene Terephthalate material.

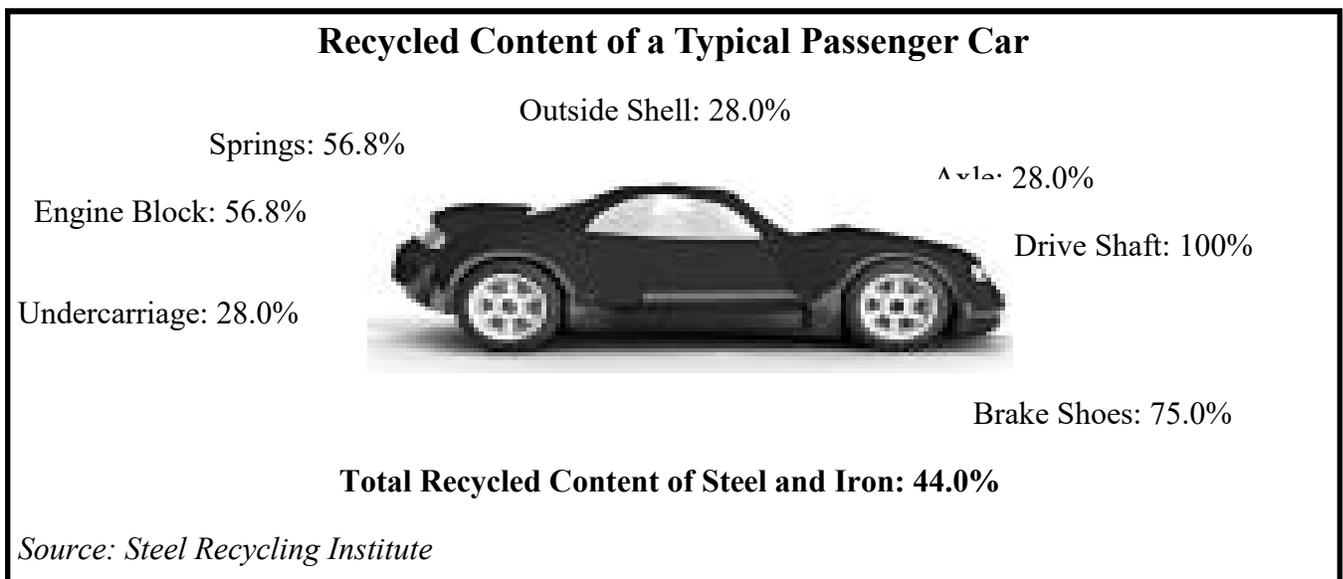
D. What National Guidelines Exist for Recycled Products?

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) has issued purchasing guidelines for the following recycled products: recycled paper and paper products, refined lubricating oil, retread tires, building insulation, and fly ash used in cement and concrete. The guidelines are intended for use by governmental purchasing agencies and their contractors. However, they are a starting point for defining recycled products for individual consumers as well.

The Recycling Advisory Council (RAC) also has definitions, a measurement system, and labeling requirements for recycled paper products. RAC is a broad-based council composed of industry, consumer, environmental, and governmental representatives. It is partially funded by the EPA (Environmental Protection Agency) and administered by the National Recycling Coalition.

3. Buying "Recycled"

"Recycled" does not mean that a product contains 100% recovered materials, nor does it mean that a product contains post-consumer materials. Recyclers are interested in the amount of post-consumer materials because recycling programs are supported with purchases of recycled products.



A. Recycling Symbol Does Not Mean Item is Recyclable

Look closely at the label. A recycling symbol does not mean that a product is made with recycled content or can be recycled in a particular community. It may just be a reminder to recycle. Read the label carefully for specific information on recycled content. If the information is not available or is unclear, ask the seller or call the 1-800 number on the label and ask. If no number is listed, call directory assistance at 1-800-555-1212 to obtain the manufacturer's number.

Recycled products can be found in a variety of locations from grocery and hardware stores to office supply stores. Look for the highest percentage of post-consumer recycled content before making a purchase.

B. Recycled Products are Not Always Labeled

Consumers are often surprised to learn that they have been buying some recycled products for years. Many manufacturers have been afraid to disclose recycled content because they fear that people will not buy their products if they know they were made from recycled material. Due to this concern, it is often hard to find out if an item is made from recycled content. No matter where one lives, five products are **safe bets** for containing a significant amount of recycled content.

- ◆ Steel - Anything made with steel including tin cans, cars, appliances, bicycles, furniture, and nails.
- ◆ Aluminum - About 50 percent of the aluminum in beverage cans comes from recycled cans.
- ◆ Glass bottles and jars - Glass recycling is a closed loop system. The glass packaging industry uses an average of 30 percent post-

consumer glass in the production of its new jars. Brown and green glass have the highest recycled content.

- ◆ Paper grocery bags are made from Kraft paper that contains post-consumer grocery bags and corrugated cardboard.
- ◆ Molded pulp containers including gray or brown cardboard, egg containers, and flower boxes.

C. Green Seal and Scientific Certification Systems Symbols on Packages

Two of the more common labels are Scientific Certification Systems (SCS) and Green Seal. SCS and Green Seal are independent organizations that certify a number of environmental product claims, including recycled content.

Green Seal recommends products based on environmental impact. They use a life-cycle analysis which includes material extraction, manufacturing, use, and recycling support. They also require that each product work as well as others in its class. Organized by Denis Hayes, a national founder of Earth Day, Green Seal assures consumers that certified products are thoroughly tested, work well, and are among the most environmentally responsible products available. Green Seal also has an outreach program which promotes environmentally responsible products.

Green Seal

1001 Connecticut Ave. NW #827
Washington DC 20036
(202) 588-8400
greenseal@greenseal.org
www.greenseal.org

SCS certifies claims by companies that products contain recycled content.

Scientific Certification Systems
2000 Powell Street, Suite 600
Emeryville, CA 94608 USA
510-452-9090
<http://www.scsglobalservices.com>



Recyclable

Location specific



**Made from
Recycled material**

Figure V-1. Recyclable and recycled logos

Standardization of Environmental Labeling Types

Environmental labels are used to help the consumer purchase products and services with low environmental impact. Currently, the International Organization for Standardization (ISO) classifies environmental labels into three categories: type I, type II, and type III.

Type-I Environmental Labels

A third-party organization sets the environmental standard for the product for Type-I environmental label certification. ISO 14024 was issued as an international standard.

- ◆ Seal of approval label
- ◆ Third party certification
- ◆ Multiple criteria with life cycle consideration
- ◆ Awarded to the best environmental performers

Examples of ISO Type I Eco-label



Type-II Environmental Labels

Self-declared environmental claim made by the manufacturer. ISO 14021 was issued as an international standard. This label is awarded for products and services meeting the environmental criteria set independently by the manufacturer.

- ◆ Statement or symbol
- ◆ Self declaration
- ◆ Single attribute

Examples of ISO Type II Eco-label

- ◆ **Statements**
 - ◆ Compostable, biodegradable, recyclable
- ◆ **Symbols**



Type-III Environmental Labels

These labels display quantitative information on a product's environmental performance, based on life-cycle assessments. The intention is to allow the customer to evaluate the product's environmental impact, by disclosing quantitative data. Type-III environmental labels are issued as an international standard in technical report ISO/TR 14025.

- ◆ Report card
- ◆ Third party verification
- ◆ Quantitative information
- ◆ Multiple attributes with life cycle consideration

Example of ISO Type III Eco-label



D. Federal Trade Commission (FTC) Guide on Recycled Content Claims

Products that claim to benefit the environment must disclose the data that defines these benefits. In order to reduce consumer confusion and to prevent false and misleading uses of common environmental terms, the FTC has created a guide for recycled claims.

- ◆ Claims should be clear and prominently displayed.
- ◆ Environmental claims on products, packaging, or components must be factual.
- ◆ Environmental marketing claims must not exaggerate their benefit or their effect on the environment.
- ◆ Advertisers must be able to prove claims.

Products claiming to be recyclable must clearly say which parts of the product are and are not recyclable. Recycling programs may not be available in all regions of the country. Program availability should be noted on the package, a matter particularly important for plastic products. Labels and packaging must distinguish products made from pre- and post-consumer waste. Products made from pre-consumer waste must declare how much was prevented from becoming waste. Products made from post-consumer waste must state how much material was recovered from the solid waste stream.

Claims about recycled content should be qualified as to the amount and weight of recycled content in finished products or packaging. If a product contains materials that are normally reused by industry within its original manufacturing process, the manufacturer or vendor cannot claim it is a recycled product

(This is a summary of the guide. For further details, request a copy of the 1998 guide at <http://www.ftc.gov/news-events/press-releases/1998/04/ftc-expands-definition-recyclable-and-recycled-claims-agency>)

4. “Buy Recycled” Myths

Labeling is not the only issue to overcome. Negative attitudes about the quality and reliability of recycled products are also issues. Some of the most common myths about recycled products

are:

Myth #1: Recycled products are not as good as non-recycled products. Recycled products often look the same as non-recycled goods and are just as reliable and functional.

Myth #2: Recycled products are hard to find. This is no longer true. Recycled goods are available in neighborhood grocery stores as well as national retail chains. Read labels on paper and plastic items. Look for **safe bets**: steel, aluminum, paper bags, molded pulp containers, and glass.

Myth #3: Recycled products cost more. Many recycled products are priced competitively with their non-recycled counterparts. Some products, like retread tires, may even be less expensive.

Myth #4: Recycled Products are inferior in quality. Recycled products have the same quality, reliability, and dependability as virgin products.

5. Recycled Products Info

Product Variety: There are currently over 4,500 products made from recycled content.

Product Quality & Performance: Many recycled products are made to the same standards as their virgin material counterparts.

Product Availability: Many recycled products are manufactured by smaller companies, which may limit availability in certain parts of the United States. As manufacturers become aware that government and corporate purchasers are increasing their use of recovered materials, the production volume, distribution, and availability of these products will expand.

Product Information: The more information one has on the **percentage** and **type** of recycled content in a product the easier it will be to understand the character of that recycled product. Type refers to the kind of recycled content in the product (pre- or post-consumer). Percentage is the proportional content of each type of recycled material.

First Life	Recycled Life
	
	
	
<p>Glass beverage containers can be recycled over and over again. But they can also be used for other things you may not expect. Like roads. Marbles. Decorative tiles. Surfboards. And a host of other products and materials.</p>	<p>Recycling of polyethylene terephthalate (PET) bottles remains steady with about 27% of all the bottles produced being recycled. These bottles are turned into everything from rugs to goggles, park benches and fences to fiber for filling ski jackets.</p>
<p>Steel and aluminum cans can be easily recycled for use in other steel and aluminum products. This not only conserves mineral resources, but the recycling process also uses about 75% less energy than using virgin materials. Recycled steel and aluminum finds its way into new cars, bikes, appliances, cookware, and a whole lot more.</p>	
<p><i>Source: 2004 America Recycles Day</i></p>	

A. Five Reasons to Buy Recycled

- ◆ **Saves natural resources:** Making products from recycled materials instead of virgin materials conserves land and reduces the need to drill for oil, mine minerals, or cut down trees.
- ◆ **Saves energy:** It usually takes less energy to make recycled products. Recycled aluminum uses 95 percent less energy than creating new aluminum smelted from raw bauxite.
- ◆ **Pollutes less:** Making products from recycled materials puts fewer contaminants into air and water than manufacturing from virgin materials.

- ◆ **Saves landfill space:** New products that use recycled materials divert waste away from incinerators and landfills.
- ◆ **Saves money and creates jobs:** Recycling is often the least expensive waste management method for communities. Recycling creates more jobs than waste disposal does.

B. Four Reasons to Use Remanufactured Products

- ◆ **Remanufacturing** uses 85 percent less energy.

- ◆ The raw materials saved in one year by re-manufacturing worldwide would fill 155,000 railroad cars, forming a train 1,100 miles long.
- ◆ Remanufactured products sell for 25 to 50 percent less than new products.
- ◆ Often, remanufactured products are no longer available as new products (for example, antique equipment).

6. Start a “Buy-Recycled” Program in Work/Volunteer Settings

A. Find One or More Champions

Identify persons in the organization who are enthusiastic and will push recycling objectives. A group accomplishes more than a “lone ranger” who can become discouraged.

B. Get Support

Create a written “buy-recycled” policy for the organization. Any program works better when everyone supports and understands the policy. Share visions with management and solicit endorsement. Management support is essential. These personnel have access to resources and can emphasize the program’s importance to the purchasing staff.

C. Learn About Recycled Products

Network and collect samples of recycled products. Talk with other organizations who have started “buy-recycled” programs. Useful seminars are also available. Many recycled products will fit the needs of most organizations.

D. Consider Purchasing Remanufactured Products

Check warranty information as a part of cost comparisons.

E. Establish Guidelines for Ordering Materials

- 1) Review needs. Is there a specific reason to purchase virgin materials? Address biases others may have against recycled products. Most problems associated with recycled products are based on appearance, not performance. High brightness does not make paper easier to use, nor are clear plastic bags necessarily better.
- 2) Determine base line definition for “recycled.” How much recycled content is in the product? What is the acceptable minimum recycled content? It may be necessary to research the product standards and obtain documents and certification for the recycled product.
- 3) Is this product available locally? Many businesses prefer to buy locally. Also, many businesses can get specific products if there

Examples of Currently Available Recycled Materials

Glass

- ◆ Abrasives - loose grain
- ◆ Jewelry
- ◆ Liquid filter media
- ◆ Recycled content containers
- ◆ Underdrain units for drainage
- ◆ Decorative tile

Transportation Uses

- ◆ Anti-freeze
- ◆ Re-refined engine lubricating oils
- ◆ Retread tires (airplanes, automobiles, buses, off-road vehicles, and trucks)
- ◆ Pallets
- ◆ Road signs and posts
- ◆ Truck bed mats

Aluminum

- ◆ Aluminum beverage cans
- ◆ Other aluminum cans

Construction Materials

- ◆ Asphalt concrete (containing crumb rubber or glass cullet)
- ◆ Acoustic ceiling tiles
- ◆ Carpet
- ◆ Compost and mulch
- ◆ Culverts
- ◆ Plastic drain pipe
- ◆ Plastic fence posts and fencing
- ◆ Plastic floor tiles
- ◆ Plastic landscaping timbers
- ◆ Portland cement concrete (with coal ash)
- ◆ Portable rubber road mats
- ◆ Recycled asphalt or concrete
- ◆ Railroad ties
- ◆ Roofing insulation and shingles
- ◆ Shower and toilet partitions
- ◆ Thermal insulation
- ◆ Upholstery fabric
- ◆ Wall board

Paper Products

- ◆ Adding machine and cash register tape
- ◆ Bond/letterhead
- ◆ Coated and uncoated printing papers
- ◆ Computer paper
- ◆ Construction paper
- ◆ Copier paper
- ◆ Corrugated and paperboard boxes
- ◆ Food service bowls and carry-out trays (molded pulp)
- ◆ Greeting cards
- ◆ Mailing tubes
- ◆ Map paper
- ◆ Newsprint
- ◆ Calendars
- ◆ Envelopes & padded mailers
- ◆ Fax paper
- ◆ File folders (manila, hanging and expanding)
- ◆ Labels
- ◆ Post-It™ Notes
- ◆ Writing tablets
- ◆ Poster board
- ◆ Storage boxes
- ◆ Text and cover stock
- ◆ Tissue and towel products
- ◆ Wrapping paper

Plastic Products

- ◆ Bags
- ◆ Bicycle racks
- ◆ Boxes, bins, and containers
- ◆ Carpet
- ◆ Curb edging
- ◆ Fiber fill
- ◆ Food service trays
- ◆ Lighting covers
- ◆ Lumber
- ◆ Manhole steps
- ◆ Mats
- ◆ Desk sets
- ◆ High lighters and markers
- ◆ Pens and pencils
- ◆ Recharged toner cartridges
- ◆ Picnic tables and benches
- ◆ Safety barriers

Rubber Products

- ◆ Bulletin boards
- ◆ Dock bumpers
- ◆ Carpet under-cushion
- ◆ Fenders
- ◆ Gaskets
- ◆ Floor tiles and mats
- ◆ Industrial hoses
- ◆ Playground equipment and surfacing
- ◆ Portable bases and walkways
- ◆ Speed bumps
- ◆ Trailer bumpers
- ◆ Wheel chocks

Steel

- ◆ Columns
- ◆ Flat roll products
- ◆ I-beams
- ◆ Nails
- ◆ Re-bar supports
- ◆ Steel cans
- ◆ Structural plates

Sources: *The Official Recycled Products Guide*, *Recycled Products Information*, *The Recycled Products Catalogue*, *Steel Can Recycling Institute*

is a demand.

- 4) Are product substitutions acceptable? Be sure to specify the type of material and amount of recycled content to be used.

F. Work with Suppliers

Recycled products have not yet achieved economies of scale that keep prices low. Therefore recycled feedstock may be more expensive than virgin material feedstock. When the domestic market suffers a recession, the prices of virgin materials may also sink due to lower demand.

Not all recycled products are more expensive. When working with vendors, be prepared to ask for product prices in a price range. If products are beyond the budget, challenge vendors to find quality, recycled products at lower prices. The goal is to increase the demand for recycled products so that the price will go down.

Establish a pricing policy and a plan to implement it. Three common practices are: price preferences, set asides, and cooperative purchasing.

Price Preferences is paying a higher price (usually 5 to 10 percent more) for recycled products.

Set Asides is a program in which a given percentage of total purchases must have recycled content.

Cooperative purchasing allows organizations with similar purchasing needs to pool their purchases under a single bid rather than buying their products individually. It also helps manufacturers produce stock of similar items.

The benefits to consumers include:

- ◆ Bulk discounts
- ◆ Increased demand for recycled products
- ◆ Encouragement for more groups to buy recycled products
- ◆ Increased availability of recycled products
- ◆ Lowered administrative costs
- ◆ Established common definitions, guidelines, and percentages for recycled items.

These purchasing techniques help an organization overcome price differentials, remain com-

mitted to buying recycled products, and prevent expenditures from increasing.

G. Test Products

Do not assume that recycled products are inferior and look for problems. A paper jam does not mean the paper is inferior. When in doubt, test a variety of products. If users object to recycled products, consider using a blind test. For example, test virgin and recycled oil in company vehicles. Do not let operators know which type of product is in their vehicle. This reduces the chance of imaginary problems based on the fear of using recycled products. Keep records and advertise the test results.

H. Set up a Green Procurement Team to Promote the “Buy-Recycled” Program

Promotion is part of the education process. Target internal and external customers, as well as suppliers.

- 1) Work with existing vendors. Encourage suppliers to provide recycled products. If they do not, research product availability and continue to request them. Experience shows that they will start to carry those products.
- 2) If the organization purchases from a regional vendor, ask suppliers to highlight recycled products in their catalogs. (Example: Boise Cascade)
- 3) Make sure publications, literature, and business forms are printed on recycled paper. Include words “Printed on recycled paper”. Information on the “buy-recycled” program should be in newsletters, annual reports, and advertising.

I. Monitor the Program

- 1) Document how the program started and what products were used. Documentation helps future budgets.
- 2) Monitor quantities of products purchased and user acceptance. Keep a baseline year. Costs will fluctuate. Expect higher administrative costs at the beginning of the program. These will go down as people adjust to the program.

- 3) Analyze user acceptance of products. Document successes and failures. This helps distinguish real problems with the products from perceived problems.
- 4) Publicize successes. Document all the steps taken to resolve problems with products.

J. Stay Informed

The recycled product market changes very rapidly. Stay on top of the changes in products and use this information to revise product specification and expand the “buy-recycled” program.

K. Offer Internal Training

Take what has been learned from outside sources and offer internal training seminars for key personnel like custodial staff, safety staff, engineers, purchasers, and management.

Source: *Buy Recycled Guide, Buy Recycled Business Alliance*

7. Existing “Buy-Recycled” Programs

Many of the easiest “buy-recycled” programs to research have been started by government.

The Resource Conservation & Recovery Act (RCRA) requires government agencies who spend federal dollars to buy recycled products. In 1993, President Clinton signed Executive Order 12873 designed to increase Federal government use of recycled content products. To clarify these rules, the EPA developed two documents: the Comprehensive Procurement Guidelines (CPG) and Recovered Materials Advisory Notices (RMANs). The RMANs is a good source for purchasing recycled products. If you are interested in which government agencies are required to buy recycled products, you can consult the online database: <http://www3.epa.gov/epawaste/conservetools/cpg/index.htm>. The CPG document has helped many local governments examine their purchasing practices.

Information on waste prevention and recycling in the federal government is promoted in a quarterly newsletter “Closing the Circle News.”

“Greening the Government” is a guide that explains Executive Order 12873. Both are available through the website www.ofee.gov or by contacting the Office of the Federal Environmental Executive at <http://www.ofee.gov/contact.asp>.

Oregon’s Buy Recycled Statute ORS 279-545

states that State agencies should give preference to materials and supplies from recycled products if (a) the recycled product is available, (b) the recycled product meets applicable standards, (c) the recycled product can be substituted for a comparable non-recycled product, and (d) the recycled product costs do not exceed the costs of non-recycled products by 5%. This statute also states that, under some circumstances, a state or public agency may give preference to the purchase of materials and supplies manufactured from recycled materials even if the cost differential exceeds 5%.

Some areas, such as Marion County, have a Buy Recycled Day. This program focuses on buying products that are reused or made with recycled content and getting people to think about what they buy.

These are good questions to get into the habit of asking oneself.

- ◆ Where can I **reduce** the amount of material I use?
- ◆ What could I buy in a **reusable** form that I am currently disposing?
- ◆ Are there **repairable, refillable, or more durable products** that would give a longer, more useful life?
- ◆ If what I buy cannot be reused, can it be **recycled**?
- ◆ How can I **reduce the toxicity** of the materials I use?
- ◆ What could I buy that is made of recycled material?
- ◆ Do I really need it?

America Recycles Day is a national event occurring every November 15th. The goal of America Recycles Day is to increase the purchase of recycled content products and increase recycling throughout the U.S. Themes in the past have included: “Keep Recycling Working: Buy Recycled” and “If you’re not buying recycled, you’re not really recycling.”

8. Closed Loop Systems

Closed loop systems occur when a public or private organization and individuals collect recyclable materials and also buy products made from recycled materials. Manufacturers also help to close the loop through “take-back” programs for worn-out, used-up or no longer needed product.

This system is designed to stimulate weak recycled materials markets and to use less virgin material. Some offices have a recycling relationship with toner cartridge manufacturers so that an office provides empty cartridges and agrees to purchase remanufactured cartridges.

Good communication between recyclers and manufacturers is essential to make these programs work. Closed loop systems can be used for economic development. Some manufacturers of recycled products may be persuaded to relocate to a community that will assure a supply of recycled materials for manufacture, along with an instant market to purchase the product. This creates jobs and reduces the trash disposal problems of the community.

9. Purchasing Decisions

Many recyclers have discovered that even the best buy recycled programs do not significantly reduce the amount of trash in the waste stream. Recycling systems require an extensive financial investment. Recycling collection and recycled manufacturing systems are expensive. Reducing the amount of waste generated is the least expensive solution. Waste prevention was explored in Chapter III.

10. Resources for Buy Recycled Campaigns

U.S. Environmental Protection Agency Waste Wise Helpline - 800/EPA-WISE

<http://www3.epa.gov/epawaste/conservesmm/wastewise/>

Resource Conservation & Recovery Act www.epa.gov/waste/inforesources/online

King County's Commission for Marketing

Recyclable Materials

your.kingcounty.gov/solidwaste/about/documents/Market_Assess-1998.pdf

<http://your.kingcounty.gov/solidwaste/ecoconsumer/green-holidays>



Chapter V Closing the Loop

Purchasing Intentionally

PREFLECTION – Picture the symbols on products you purchase.

- Which of these symbols have meaning to you?
- Which of these are related to recycled materials?
- Jot down the products you knowingly buy that include recycled materials.
- What recyclables are incorporated in these products?

ACTION – Investigate products for recycled content.

- Look in your pantry for products that have information about recycled packaging.
- Check bath and kitchen paper products at home for inclusion of pre- and post- consumer recycled materials.
- Visit a store that sells office products. Look at labels on copy paper for special certifications and recycled content.
- Visit a department store and look at plastic products for information about recycled content.
- Do a web search for symbols and certifications for paper, plastic, metal, or glass recycled products. (<http://www.earthodyssey.com/symbols.html> is an interesting place to begin).
- Visit with a clerk or manager in a store you frequent about ways the store is trying to “close the loop” on products it sells.

REFLECTION – Ask yourself these questions:

- What products that include recycled content have I purchased in the last week?
- How much more am I willing to spend (in money, time, energy) to help create a demand for recycled content products?
- What are the downsides of using products made from recycled content?
- How do I impact the buying habits of persons within my sphere of influence?

RE-ACTION – Increase the number of recycled content products in your life.

- Identify and research costs and availability of one product made from recycled content that could replace a product you now use.
- Talk with the buyer at your place of employment about choosing recycled content products.

INVOLVE YOUR CHILDREN

- Look for recycling symbols together.