

History and Background on the Development of the US Department of Energy's GreenBuy Awards Program and Priority Products List initiated in Fiscal Year (FY) 2010

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Federal policy requires all agencies to give preference to environmentally preferable products that use less energy and water, reduce or eliminate waste at the source, promote the use of nontoxic or less toxic substances, implement conservation techniques, and reuse materials rather than put them into the waste stream. To achieve these benefits, the Federal government has established requirements for the preferential purchase of products (often referred to as designated products). These designated products now number in the hundreds with a wide variety of single attribute criteria (biobased/recycled content, energy efficient, water efficient, etc.).

To help navigate this large, overlapping set of requirements, the U.S. Department of Energy's (DOE) Office of Sustainability Support developed a voluntary program--the GreenBuy Award based on a list of products with goals that go beyond compliance to embody leadership-level sustainability attributes. The Priority Products list helps DOE sites 1) focus on which products are most pertinent to their mission and 2) recognize the importance of seeking products with multiple sustainable attributes.

The goal of this voluntary program is to give DOE sites 1) concrete recommendations to help identify sustainable products and 2) credit for whatever forward motion they make toward transitioning to more sustainable products. That brought about the decision to offer a variety of goals - all the way from multi-attribute standards to single attributes.

The program includes:

- 1) A Priority Products List – composed of the focus product categories and recommended goals (specifications, standards and ecolabels) to use to identify and procure environmentally preferable products for those product categories, and
- 2) An annual awards ceremony for DOE sites who meet certain levels of use of the recommendations provided in the Priority Products List

Product Category Selection

DOE based the selection of product categories on the following criteria:

- Those purchased in largest quantities by DOE sites, especially the products designated for preferable purchasing by Federal agencies;
- Those containing ingredients that could affect staff health or disposal costs;
- Those readily available that meet performance requirements;
- Those with a reasonable price or that DOE sites have already indicated they are purchasing despite higher price. Examples of those with a higher price are organic food, biobased content products (excluding cleaners), LED lights, 50% post-consumer copy paper. These often show themselves to be price equivalent when life cycle costs are taken into account. However, showing the benefits of avoiding food with pesticides, for example, is hard to quantify in dollars but some DOE sites are specifying organic food. Many of the goals lead to less expensive products, such as remanufactured paint, biobased cleaners, reclaimed coolants, and retread tires.

Several similar products were grouped together such as the suite of cafeteria containers and cleaning products.

Goals Selection

DOE based the selection of goals on (listed roughly in order of priority):

- Standards with multiple sustainable attributes instead of single attributes*;
- Standards or ecolabels with third-party, neutral certification;
- Standards or ecolabels to which sufficient products have been certified and for which a list of the certified products is publicly available;
- Standards or ecolabels specified at the time by the Leadership in Energy & Environmental Design (LEED) new construction and existing buildings standards as a basis for supporting the Five Guiding Principles for Federal Leadership in High Performance and Sustainable Buildings;
- Standards or ecolabels currently used in the U.S. market place;
- Standards or ecolabels that support Federal sustainable acquisition requirements and generally go well beyond the requirements and
- Highest percentage of biobased or recycled content available on the market even if the legal requirement is lower. (Example: 30 percent recycled content paper is legally required for purchase but the market offers up to 100 percent.)

Non-Governmental Standards and Ecolabels Selection

For the goals based on non-governmental standards or ecolabels, the DOE process for identifying credible standards or ecolabels was the following:

- Research done by S.D. Cannon for the book, *The Competitive Advantage: EcoPurchasing*, 2006, Battelle Press. Columbus, Ohio.
- 2010 evaluation of product standards specified in LEED
- 2014 work with the General Services Administration on the development of their Priority Products list
- 2015 webinar with Responsible Purchasing Network sustainable acquisition experts to gather their input on each product and goal in the FY2015 DOE Priority Products list
- Continual ongoing research

Updates to the DOE Priority Products List

The first DOE Priority Products List was issued in FY2010. From the beginning, the Priority Products List has been presented as a living document and is regularly updated. All updates to the scope of product categories or recommended specifications, standards, or ecolabels include an assessment of any proposed changes against the stated criteria above. As new information about products and specifications, standards and ecolabels becomes available, it is evaluated based on the above criteria and informs changes to the Priority Products List. To submit information for consideration as part of a future update to the DOE Priority Products List, please contact Shab Fardanesh (shabnam.fardanesh@hq.doe.gov).

Reviews by Organizations and Federal Agencies

The Priority Products List has been reviewed by the Sustainable Purchasing Leadership Council and the Responsible Purchasing Network – two organizations with expertise in helping purchasers procure environmentally preferable products and services. This list has also been reviewed by members of the inter-agency Sustainable Acquisition and Material Management Workgroup. Members include representatives from over 20 federal agencies, including the Department of Defense, the US General Services

Administration, US Environmental Protection Agency, US Department of Agriculture, and the US Department of Veteran Affairs.

Results

The Priority Products List is the basis for the DOE GreenBuy Award Program. That Program was launched in FY 2011. Since that time, nearly half of all DOE sites have met the Priority Product goals and nominated themselves for a GreenBuy Award. DOE's goal is to continually improve the program and incentivize behavioral change toward recognition of the importance of sustainable products.

- * Some of the priority products goals allow the option of not choosing a product with the required single attribute. The non-federal programs are authorized under the environmentally preferable category within the Federal Acquisition Regulations. This category is broad enough to cover these non-federal ecolabels. There is no priority between buying products certified under a specific federal sustainability program (for example, BioPreferred) and environmentally preferable. As a result, agencies can choose which requirements they want to specify.

Contact

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