

Sustainable Procurement Guide for Print Cartridges



Procurement is increasingly tasked to meet sustainability requirements for printer cartridges, but verifiable criteria and standards can be difficult to locate.

Any company selling printing supplies should supply customers with data on the sustainability of their organization as well as their products and how they contribute to YOUR sustainability goals.



The EPEAT eco-label

The EPEAT® label identifies products that meet minimum performance standards for energy efficiency, toxicity reduction, and materials selection.

Use of EPEAT-registered electronic products is required for all U.S. federal organizations and many state, provincial, local, education, and corporate organizations.



For print systems, EPEAT includes several requirements specific to print cartridges, including **indoor air quality (IAQ)** and **take-back and recycling programs** for cartridges and toner powder.¹

Other procurements standards may need to be met by your printing system, such as safety data sheets, recycled content, page yield, or print quality.

Topic	What questions should you ask?	Why it matters:
Indoor air quality (IAQ) for printing systems	<p>Do the printer cartridges meet EPEAT emissions guidelines when used in a qualifying printer?</p> <p>Does the vendor provide results from third-party testing to confirm levels of emissions from cartridges, including volatile organic compounds (VOCs) and others listed by EPEAT's Indoor Air Quality standard?</p>	<p>Americans spend an estimated 90% of their time indoors, and the levels of common air pollutants can be two to five times higher indoors than outdoors.²</p> <p>EPEAT 4.10.1.1 Indoor Air Quality Emission Requirements</p>
Take-back and recycling programs	<p>Does the supplier offer a print supplies take-back and recycling program for depleted supplies?</p>	<p>EPEAT requires suppliers to recycle both the plastic and the toner material after collecting the cartridges. They should also provide annual reporting of the metrics.</p> <p>EPEAT 4.9.3.1 Provision of take-back and recycling service for cartridges and containers (includes process restrictions and reporting requirement)</p> <p>EPEAT 4.9.3.2 Manufacturer recycles or reuses all toner material collected through its cartridge and container take-back program</p> <p>EPEAT 4.9.3.3 Manufacturer recycles or reuses all plastic collected through its cartridge and container take-back program</p>

Additional requirements

Topic	What questions should you ask?	Why it matters:
Recycled content	Do the supplier's toner cartridges contain recovered materials (such as post-consumer plastic)? What percent of content is recovered material? NOTE: The EPA does not set a minimum level of recovered material.	Efficient use of materials helps reduce environmental impacts. Keeping materials in use at their highest value is preferable to sending them to landfills—and is part of the Circular Economy.
Safety Data Sheet (SDS)	Does the supplier provide Safety Data Sheets (SDSs) for printer cartridges? Do SDSs identify hazardous substances in the local language?	Without SDSs, workers may be exposed to hazardous substances without being aware of the risks.
Lifecycle assessment	Does the supplier publish a complete lifecycle assessment that is ISO 14040 compliant?	ISO 14040 requires critical peer reviews of all lifecycle assessments that should be publicly disclosed. The term 'life cycle' refers to the notion that for a fair, holistic assessment, the raw material production, manufacture, distribution, use, and disposal (including all intervening transportation steps) need to be assessed. ³
Sustainability program	Does the supplier publish a sustainability report that aligns to a credible third-party standard such as the Sustainability Accounting Standards Board (SASB) or the Global Reporting Initiative (GRI)?	Transparency and credibility from suppliers enable a company to support human rights, good labor conditions, and environmental stewardship within the organization and throughout the supply chain.
Cartridge characterization and substitution	Does the supplier disclose the country of origin and one of these designations for cartridges? • OEM cartridge • Non-OEM cartridge • Remanufactured cartridge (some parts renewed) • Refilled cartridge (no parts renewed)	Refilled and remanufactured cartridges are not standardized and can impact product quality and reliability and thus generate waste. Supplies should not be substituted without customer approval.
Environmental management system	Is the printing supply manufacturer certified against the ISO 14001 environmental management system (provide certificates)?	The ISO 14001 standards ensure a company is aware of its environmental impacts and follows a process for continuous improvement.
Page yields	Does the supplier report cartridge page yield in accordance with ISO/IEC 19752, ISO/IEC 19798 or ISO/IEC 24711?	The page yield is connected to usability and number of pages possible to print based on a reliable standard—often a priority for public sector customers—and provides resource efficiency.
Product quality and reliability	Does the supplier provide reference to third-party reports and data that support quality and reliability claims?	Product quality and reliability have both cost and environmental impacts, like reduction of waste and carbon footprint.



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For additional information on EPEAT guidelines for U.S. federal purchasers, visit epa.gov/sites/production/files/documents/epeat.pdf or learn more at epeat.net.

1. A printing system consists of a printer, paper, and print supply (usually a print cartridge).
2. For more information, see epa.gov/report-environment/indoor-air-quality.
3. Learn more about product lifecycle considerations at iso.org/news/2006/07/Ref1019.html.

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