

5.6 Office Supplies

Office supplies consists of all the “soft” materials that make an office function. The items in this category focus on the feedstock for office equipment.

5.6.1 Batteries

An Overview

In Canada, performance standards for batteries are published by the International Electrotechnical Commission.

Traditionally, batteries contained a high degree of mercury, a highly toxic metal. Mercury’s toxicity to the environment increases when converted by microorganisms under anaerobic conditions to organomercury compounds. It is known to concentrate in organisms and magnify in food chains.

Mercury previously sold in batteries is still found in municipal waste streams and has been estimated to account for 35% of the total release of mercury into the environment in Canada.

Potential Environmental Impacts

- Batteries may pose a threat to the environment during their production and disposal because of certain toxic substances. The major substance of concern has traditionally been mercury.

Things to Consider If You Write Your Own Specifications

This is an opportunity to add clauses in battery specifications to address:

- Preference for batteries that carry the EcoLogo
- Preference for rechargeable batteries
- Preference for distribution and end-of use disposal by the same contractor.

Specifications from Other Agencies and Seals of Approval

Environmental Choice program guideline ECP-04
(details at www.environmentalchoice.com/guidelines/pdfs/ecp-04.pdf)

5.6.2 Envelopes

An Overview

Over 10 billion envelopes are produced in Canada each year.

The manufacturing process for envelopes involves production of the paper used as the main raw material, the printing processes and the chemical components of inks, adhesives and other materials used in the process. The manufacturing process has an impact on the recyclability of envelopes.

Potential Environmental Impacts

Unnecessary end of use disposal of varying grades of paper.

Things to Consider If You Write Your Own Specifications

This is an opportunity to add clauses in envelope specifications to address:

- Preference for products that carry the EcoLogo
- Preference for products with stipulated levels of pre and post consumer waste recycling
- Preference for unbleached paper.

Specifications from Other Agencies and Seals of Approval

Environmental Choice program guideline ECP-75
(details at www.environmentalchoice.com/guidelines/pdfs/ecp-75.pdf)

5.6.3 Printing and Writing Papers (and uncoated mechanical printing paper)

An Overview

For both product categories: “Printing and writing paper” and “Uncoated Mechanical printing paper” the Environmental Choice Program has set out a guideline developed using a multi-parameter approach.

The guideline does NOT specify a minimum content of recycled material. That parameter has been incorporated into the calculation of resource consumption and waste production. (Performance in this area improves as the amount of recycled material increases.)

This method identifies the most important environmental stressors from all stages of the product life. The environmental requirements identifying pulp and paper aim to lower environmental impacts through:

- Reduction in air emissions
- Reduction in water emissions
- Reduction of waste
- Efficient use of fibre and recycled fibre
- Reduction of energy use.

Potential Environmental Impacts

- Production of all types of paper in pulp and paper mills consumes significant quantities of energy and resources.
- Waterborne and airborne emissions to the environment.
- Process generates significant waste.

Things to Consider If You Write Your Own Specifications

This is an opportunity to add clauses in paper specifications to address:

- Preference for products that carry the EcoLogo
- Preference for products with stipulated levels of pre and post consumer waste recycling.

Specifications from Other Agencies and Seals of Approval

Environmental Choice program guideline ECP-77

(details at www.environmentalchoice.com/guidelines/pdfs/ecp-77.pdf)

Environmental Choice program guideline ECP-78

(details at www.environmentalchoice.com/guidelines/pdfs/ecp-78.pdf)

Case Study: Eco-Certified Paper Mill

Fletcher Challenge Canada’s Elk Falls paper mill is the first major mill in Canada to receive an eco-certification supported by environmental groups such as Greenpeace and the Sierra Club. The mill, located on Vancouver Island, received chain-of-custody certification that meets Forest Stewardship Council standards.

John Cathro, chair of the FCS committee, says the push for certification is being driven by consumer demand. “These companies are being told by buyer groups or by their clients that consumers are demanding certified products.”

At the moment several small operations in B.C. are certified but they can not provide enough fibre to meet Fletcher’s paper demands. The onus is now on larger forest companies to make changes to their practices to ensure an adequate supply of FCS certified fibre.

5.6.4 Miscellaneous Recycled Paper Products

An Overview

Waste paper such as old newspaper (ONP), printing and writing paper (OP), old corrugated containers (OCC) and other packaging (MP) contributes about 35% by weight to the municipal waste stream.

As recently as 1990, markets of an appreciable size had not been developed for recycling of paper other than ONP. Not all of the waste paper was recoverable because of limitations such as paper contamination. Now markets for and products made from recycled paper exist.

The occasion now arises to purchase products like boxes, packaging and trays and forms made from recycled paper products.

Potential Environmental Impacts

- Unnecessary end of use disposal of varying grades of paper.

Things to Consider If You Write Your Own Specifications

This is an opportunity to add clauses in paper specifications to address:

- Preference for products that carry the EcoLogo
- Preference for products with stipulated levels of pre and post consumer waste recycling.

Specifications from Other Agencies and Seals of Approval

Environmental Choice program guideline ECP-10
(details at www.environmentalchoice.com/guidelines/pdfs/ecp-10.pdf)