



GLOBAL
ELECTRONICS
COUNCIL

Sustainability for a Connected Future

SAN FRANCISCO AND EPEAT

Case Study





Highlights

San Francisco's successful use of the EPEAT ecolabel in procurement is based on strong foundational sustainability policies that align with purchasing processes and approvals.

- *EPEAT's multi-attribute life cycle criteria helps San Francisco leverage their IT purchases to achieve a wide array of sustainability focused goals.*
- *EPEAT helped San Francisco achieve its sustainable purchasing goals without meaningfully hindering product availability or resulting in increased pricing.*
- *The percentage of purchases of EPEAT Gold-registered products has consistently been over 80%. This percentage declined somewhat (to purchase of 63% Gold-registered products) in 2019 due to the rollout of new, more rigorous EPEAT criteria which reduced the availability of Gold tier products for several months.*

Introduction

The City and County of San Francisco (the City), population 884,000, is known as a global hub of IT innovation and a pioneer in sustainability leadership. The City's sustainability leadership manifests itself through a suite of sustainable purchasing policies that require the purchase of sustainable IT products and services. The City government has diverse and specialized IT needs, including an international airport and a large system of reservoirs, water supply, and electrical rights of way that extend across the state. In FY 2019-20, San Francisco spent \$350 million on IT projects.

The City began requiring EPEAT Gold for computers, laptops, and monitor purchases in 2008 and has expanded its use of EPEAT to include office imaging equipment, televisions, and servers as of January 2019. When San Francisco adopted EPEAT in 2008, it became the first major US city to require EPEAT Gold in its computer purchases.

The City's impetus for pursuing EPEAT is based upon multiple overlapping ordinances that promote the purchase of sustainable products and services. At the highest level, the City's Precautionary Principle Policy ([Env. Code, Chapt. 1](#)) establishes a general mandate for taking proactive measures to prevent harm, especially in the realm of toxic chemicals. More specifically to sustainable procurement, the City's Green Purchasing Program aims its efforts at a wide variety of impact areas, reflective of its mandates in the San Francisco [Environment Code](#). For this reason, the City has long favored the use of EPEAT since it contains broad multi-attribute criteria.

EPEAT helps San Francisco to realize the value in several of the environmental impact areas noted in the San Francisco Environmental Code. Issues of importance to San Francisco outlined in the Code include:

- Reduce occupational health hazards for City staff as well as reduce exposure of City residents and visitors to potentially toxic chemicals by purchasing products for use in City operations that do not harm human health or the environment
- Reduce San Francisco's contribution to global climate change by purchasing products that lead to a reduction in greenhouse gas emissions from commodities
- Protect the quality of ground and surface waters by eliminating the use of chemicals known to contaminate local water resources through toxicity, bioaccumulation or persistence
- Preserve resources locally and globally through purchasing practices that include:
 - Maximizing water and energy efficiency and favoring renewable energy sources
 - Maximizing post-consumer recycled content and readily recyclable or compostable materials
 - Favoring long-term use through product durability, repairability, and reuse
 - Considering life cycle economics of a product that includes manufacture, transportation, use, and disposal

EPEAT Adoption

San Francisco Buy-In Built Upon a Strong Sustainably-Focused Regulatory Framework

San Francisco's Committee on Information Technology, or COIT, is responsible for establishing citywide IT policy, including purchasing policies. The San Francisco Department of the Environment (DOE) has a parallel mandate to develop environmentally preferable purchasing requirements for a wide variety of targeted product categories, including IT. The requirement for the purchase of EPEAT products began as a shared COIT/DOE policy, which was enforced by the City's Department of Technology.

To achieve initial buy-in, DOE assembled a list of EPEAT Gold-registered computers, laptops, and monitors, which were then circulated to San Francisco's ad hoc IT Green Team members. Green Team members included IT managers for various large City Departments. Managers confirmed that products would meet end-user needs. Once agreement was reached, the proposed purchasing policy was taken to the COIT committee and then the full COIT for approval. Ultimately, the DOE worked with the Office of Contract Administration to incorporate relevant language into the «Citywide IT Store» contract, now called the «Technology Marketplace.» The contract provides end-users a list of pre-qualified vendors. They can comply with the mandate for EPEAT Products and also requires that vendors provide full sales reports on whether products are EPEAT-registered, as well as provisions on packaging and product take-back.

San Francisco Stakeholders and Roles:

- **IT Green Team:** Provides feedback on whether registered products meet city needs.
- **Committee on Information Technology:** Development and approval of language for Citywide IT Purchasing Policy
- **Department of the Environment Director:** Approval of parallel regulation on green purchasing requirements for IT
- **Commission on the Environment:** Public oversight and advisory body for the Department of the Environment. DOE submits an annual Buy Green report to the Commission to update them on progress for a variety of product categories, including IT.

Per Chris Geiger, DOE's Green Purchasing Lead, one of the keys to San Francisco's success was engaging IT managers and others who make decisions about products, early on in the policy development process. Creating mechanisms and opportunity for communication helped all stakeholders to understand the full implications of the proposed policy. Once a generally acceptable policy is in place, Geiger says, it's essential to make sure that you integrate and test the policy against existing IT purchase approval mechanisms. To ensure continued alignment between policy and procurement activities, DOE submits an annual Buy Green report to the Commission to update them on progress for a variety of product categories, including IT. As of 2019, policy updates are completed annually.

How EPEAT Addresses Common Procurement Concerns

San Francisco's ability to understand the implications of policy goals on procurement outcomes was key to the success of the EPEAT initiative. Early efforts to explore how the use of EPEAT would impact product availability, price implications, and other contracting considerations such as small and local purchasing requirements ensured a smooth integration of EPEAT into San Francisco's IT purchasing portfolio.

"San Francisco has been able to successfully specify EPEAT while also meeting the needs of its end-users. Though City departments are required to restrict their purchases to EPEAT products that comply with established sustainable purchasing requirements, issues of price and availability have minimal impact on the ability to purchase quality products. IT managers involved in the conversation were sufficiently versed in prices to know that the EPEAT-registered products on the lists were not significantly more expensive than other products."

Chris Geiger



Issues addressing small and local businesses are addressed through San Francisco's broader purchasing policies but had no bearing on the ability to purchase sustainable products. Questions about product utility were posed directly to members of the Green Team. For the few problems that were raised, they were successfully addressed.

Early in the process, for example, there were questions about whether a specific type of monitor with an integrated camera would qualify as EPEAT Gold. The monitor alone qualified, but under the EPEAT system at that time, the addition of the camera rendered the monitor noncompliant. The specific end-user needs for the case were assessed, and as a result, the Department of Technology granted an exemption to the EPEAT requirement. More recently, in 2019, the City was forced to revisit its purchasing requirements following EPEAT's move to make criteria for its Computers and Displays product category more aggressive. Once again, direct engagement and conversations amongst stakeholders allowed issues to be resolved and the EPEAT policy to continue to be a requirement in large citywide contracts. In addition, DOE and COIT expanded purchasing requirements considerably in 2019 to cover servers, imaging equipment, and TVs/ large digital displays.



Product Availability and Brand Diversity

City departments are required to restrict their purchases to products that comply with established purchasing requirements, which are summarized on the website sfapproved.org. The Department of the Environment works in close collaboration with COIT to develop IT purchasing requirements, which are now updated annually.

Sustainability Benefits

San Francisco's decision to pursue the purchase of EPEAT-rated products highlights how a large institution was able to leverage its purchases to accomplish its sustainability goals. Concerted action across multiple agencies led to cost savings, reductions in GHG emissions, energy savings, waste savings, and lesser negative impacts on human health.

In 2019 San Francisco purchased 6,952 EPEAT-registered products resulting in the following environmental benefits and cost savings.

Environmental Impact	Savings	Equivalent
Greenhouse Gas	19,438 metric tons	Like taking 4,126 average US cars off the road for a year
Energy	49,212 MWh	Enough to power 4,051 average US households for a year
Primary Materials	15,103 metric tons	Equal to the weight of 2,905 elephants
Hazardous Waste	129 metric tons	Equal to the weight of 1,062 refrigerators
Solid Waste	463 metric tons	Equal to the waste generated by 249 average US households for a year
Water Emissions	73 metric tons	
Air Emissions	29,575 metric tons	

For more information about EPEAT, please contact the Global Electronic Council's Purchaser Resources Team at PurchaserResources@globalelectronicscouncil.org or Chris Geiger, San Francisco Green Purchasing, Department of the Environment at chris.geiger@sfgov.org.