



How the EPEAT Ecolabel Helps You Address Social Impacts in the IT Supply Chain

The EPEAT ecolabel empowers purchasers to meet their organizational sustainability goals through their purchasing decisions. Products available through EPEAT include computers, monitors, copiers, mobile phones, televisions, and servers. EPEAT is just one of several sustainable purchasing resources freely available from the Global Electronics Council (GEC).

Why are Social Impacts a Sustainability Concern?

Sustainable products are designed and manufactured in ways that are better for the environment, the people involved in the manufacture, assembly, and end-of-life disposal of those products, and the users of these products.

Workers throughout the IT supply chain, from initial mineral extraction to production, assembly, and ultimately end-of-life processing, have historically been subject to human and labor rights abuses. Integral to the composition of electronic products are tantalum, tin, tungsten, and gold, referred to as “conflict minerals” -because they are often sourced from mines with abhorrent human rights violations and are controlled by militia groups that use money from the sale of these minerals to fund violent conflict. These minerals are labeled conflict-free when they are proven to be sourced from mines and specific geographies, such as outside of the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), where human and labor abuses are minimized. Progress is being



made, in part because of the U.S. Dodd-Frank Act, which requires companies to disclose their use of conflict minerals, if those minerals are “necessary to the functionality or production of a product” including tantalum, tin, gold or tungsten. In 2017, the U.S. Securities and Exchange Commission (SEC) decided not to enforce the Conflict Minerals reporting requirement. Even with this, the technology sector outperformed all others in reporting on conflict minerals within their supply chains.¹

Along with conflict minerals, workers within the IT supply chain face risks ranging from exposure to unsafe chemicals, use of child labor, excessive working hours, and forced labor. There has been a global focus on these issues in recent years, aided by extensive media attention and leadership by industry associations such as the Responsible Business Alliance (RBA), but the problems persist and is a necessary sustainability impact that the EPEAT ecolabel seeks to address.

How EPEAT Registered Products Address Social Impacts in the IT Supply Chain

The EPEAT ecolabel has both required and optional criteria. The required criteria ensure that the product is credibly sustainable, and a product must meet every required EPEAT criterion to be considered an “EPEAT Registered” product. Optional criteria are additional criteria that a manufacturer can choose to have their product meet. By choosing to go beyond the required criteria, manufacturers show their commitment to addressing additional environmental and social issues.

The more purchasers prefer products that address labor and human rights, the faster we’ll have a world that benefits workers along the entire supply chain.

Products from different EPEAT categories may address social impacts differently because each product category has product-specific criteria. EPEAT criteria address social impacts in the IT supply chain in the Computers and Displays, Mobile Phones, and Servers categories.

¹ <https://www.globenewswire.com/news-release/2019/10/10/1928166/0/en/Global-Lack-of-Reporting-on-Conflict-Minerals-and-Cobalt-Puts-Investors-at-Risk.html> (accessed January 16, 2020)



EPEAT Required Criteria Address Social Impacts in the IT Supply Chain

EPEAT criteria address social impacts throughout the IT supply chain, from extraction to manufacturing to end of life processing. At the extraction phase, EPEAT criteria require transparency in the identification of conflict minerals present in all registered computer, display, server, and mobile phone products. Server criteria require manufacturers to implement accredited occupational health and safety management systems in all of the manufacturer-owned facilities that play a role in the production of EPEAT-registered server products.

Worker health and safety at the end of a product's life can also be subject to risk when they unknowingly come into contact with potentially hazardous substances during product disassembly. EPEAT criteria require the identification of materials and components that need special handling to protect the health and safety of workers in recycling and refurbishment facilities.

Using Optional EPEAT Criteria to Address Social Impacts in the IT Supply Chain

When IT manufacturers choose to meet optional EPEAT criteria for social impacts, purchasers have increased transparency into both the manufacturers' and the suppliers' labor practices and social responsibility. These criteria include those for labor practices and worker health and safety certification and audits for both manufacturers and their suppliers that meet or exceed international labor standards. Additionally, optional criteria support responsible, conflict-free mines in the DRC through manufacturer and supplier contribution to in-region capacity building programs.

Examples of optional EPEAT criteria that address social impacts include:

- Participation in an in-region program that advances responsible sourcing of conflict minerals
- Certification to social responsibility performance standard
- Smelter and refiner participation in Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD)-aligned third party mechanisms



Finding the EPEAT Registered Products That Address Social Impacts in the IT Supply Chain

To find products designed to address social impacts, purchasers can search the EPEAT Registry at epeat.net. Optional criteria can be found at the bottom of the FILTERS box by clicking on "VIEW ADVANCED SEARCH OPTIONS." Search results will include products that meet all of the selected optional criteria.

Quantifying Your Positive Impact

The Global Electronics Council provides an EPEAT Benefits Calculator that can quantify specific environmental and cost savings associated with the purchase of EPEAT registered products including energy savings, greenhouse gas emission reductions, non-hazardous solid waste reductions, avoided toxic substances, smog formation potential savings, acidification potential savings, material conservation, cost savings for non-hazardous solid waste disposal, water consumption savings, eutrophication potential savings, and energy cost savings.

GEC developed the EPEAT Benefits Calculator with the support of the Eastern Research Group (ERG). ERG previously developed and maintained the US EPA Electronics Environmental Benefits Calculator. GEC empaneled an external technical review panel comprised of representatives from government, academia, research institutes, industry, and organizations purchasing IT products to review the data, assumptions, and analysis underlying the benefits calculator.

Need assistance connecting your organization's sustainability priorities to EPEAT criteria?

Contact PurchaserResources@globalelectronicscouncil.org
