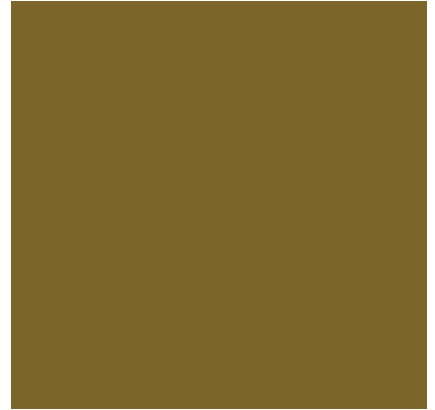




UNIVERSITY OF
SASKATCHEWAN



Smart Purchases Big Impact

Sustainable Purchasing Guide
Promotional Materials

Sustainability... your university, your world



Introduction

This section provides information on currently available **promotional item** options that can help to move the University of Saskatchewan toward its sustainability goals. Living within the boundaries of our sustainability goals requires us to apply two main strategies:

Dematerialization requires that we reduce the amount of materials as much as possible; and that we continually move toward the use of 100% recycled content.

Substitution requires that we find less harmful materials to replace those that currently damage and are not recyclable.

Sustainable purchasing is about including social, environmental, financial and performance factors in a systematic way. It involves thinking about the reasons for using the product (the service) and assessing how these services could be best met. If a product is needed, sustainable purchasing involves considering how products are made, what they are made of, where they come from and how they will be used and disposed.

Finally, remember that this is an evolving document – it will change with new information as our understanding of sustainability impacts and potential solutions improves.

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**Smart Purchases
Big Impact**

Wherever possible **CHOOSE** products that employ a combination of characteristics listed in the left hand column, and **AVOID** products that demonstrate characteristic in the right-hand column.

CHOOSE

- Alternatives to typical promotional items
- Suppliers with sustainability policies
- Natural and organic fibres
- Recycled or recyclable products
- Fair Labour

AVOID

- Plastics
- One-time-use or disposable products
- Synthetic fibres

Option: Consider Alternatives to Promotional Products

Strategy: Dematerialization (SO 1, 2, 3, 4)

All purchases made by the University of Saskatchewan represent our values and choices. The promotional materials we distribute make even clearer statements. The message we communicate with our branded goods must adhere to the highest standard of sustainability.

Alternatives to promotional products may also get our message out. In other cases, a sustainable promotional product could include information on the 'story' of the supplier or the product (e.g. locally manufactured, uses recycled plastic) as a way to give the product value beyond just its functional use.

Option: Choose Suppliers that Have Sustainability Policies

Strategy: Substitution and Dematerialization (SO 1, 2, 3, 4)

Look for evidence of social/environmental programs and codes of conduct and compliance monitoring. Many suppliers of promotional products have a "green line," but this is not the same as requiring minimum standards for all products. Avoid getting caught up in greenwashing (attempts to appear green in order to cash in on the current interest in sustainability).

Option: Reused and Recycled Products

Strategy: Dematerialization (SO 1, 2, 3, 4)

The best options are products made with re-used components or post-consumer materials. The next best option is products made of pre-consumer waste such as scraps from manufacturing that are recycled into new products.

Option: Choose Natural and Organic Fibres

Strategy: Substitution – Nature-like (SO 2, 3)

Many synthetic materials are made of petro-chemicals, a non-renewable resource. In addition, the chemicals used in their production may escape over time. Synthetic fibres do not readily breakdown at the end of their useful life.

Organic farming occurs without the use of toxic and persistent farm inputs, sewage sludge, irradiation or genetic engineering. Organic farms are accredited and certified by independent organizations. The most common organic fibre available is cotton, and other alternative fibres such as hemp and flax are becoming increasingly available.

Options: Choose Products that are Re-Usable, Recyclable or Compostable

Strategy: Substitution and Dematerialization (SO 1, 2, 3, 4)

Many promotional products are used for only a short period of time before making their way to the landfill. The toys given away by many fast food outlets are a good example. The best options are products that are useful and re-usable over a long period of time, such as cloth bags.

When choosing a product which is recyclable or compostable, ensure that local services and infrastructure can accommodate them. Many products are technically recyclable, but the facilities are not equipped to handle the materials.

Option: Know Your Plastics

Strategy: Substitution (SO 1, 2)

If you must purchase plastic products, choose carefully: not all plastics are created equal. While all conventional plastics represent issues in terms of recyclability and bio-accumulation in the environment, some represent a greater risk in terms of human health. ▼

PLASTIC #	NAME	ABBREVIATION	COMMON USES	PREFERENCE	CONCERNS
1	Polyethylene Teraphthalate	PET	Pop Bottles	Acceptable	Uses Antimony
2	High Density Polyethelene	HDPE	Milk Jugs	Preferred	
3	Polyvinyl Chloride	PVC	Plumbing Pipes	Avoid	Produces dioxins
4	Low Density Polyethelene	LDPE	Grocery Bags	Preferred	-
5	Polypropylene	-	Yogurt Cups	Preferred	-
6	Polystyrene	-	Styrofoam	Acceptable	Limited recycling facilities
7	Other	-	Water bottles	Avoid	Produces Bisphenol A

Stainless steel water bottles are the best option to replace plastic since even aluminum bottles will often have a plastic coating. Another alternative is to make use of biopolymers. Effectively plastics produced with agricultural resources instead of fossil fuels, biopolymers will naturally degrade, can often be composted and produce few of the harmful chemicals named above. Just ensure that the crops which are used to produce the biopolymer are being harvested sustainably.

Option: Apply the Fair Labour Association's (FLA) Code

Strategy- Substitution (SO 4)

The Fair Labour Association is an organization of companies, colleges, universities and civil society organizations. Their Workplace Code of Conduct lays out excellent standards which are in accordance with high levels of environmental and social stewardship. By applying their code to those the University buys products from, we successfully take into account many sustainability factors.

Arriving at the currently preferred options

1. Identify the service

Promotional products are used to reinforce brands, to communicate messages about missions and/or goals, or for event/conference promotion.

2. Assess the need

Promotional products are considered a marketing tool, and are thus considered integral to the promotion of our University.

3. Identify the contents

Promotional products can be made from a wide variety of products, including **plastics**, ferrous and non-ferrous **metals** and **fibres**.

continued on page 3...

Sustainability... your university, your world 

4. Identify sustainability impacts

i. ...systematically increasing concentrations of substances from the earth's crust?

- **Fossil fuels** are combusted to provide energy during the extraction of raw materials, transportation and the production of promotional products.
- The **petroleum or natural gas** used as feedstock for most plastics and synthetic fibres is extracted from the earth's crust at a rate much greater than it is re-deposited back into the earth's crust.

ii. ...systematically increasing concentrations of substances produced by society?

- If **plastic** products are not recycled, they usually end up in landfills or incinerators. The plastic persists in the environment after it is used and discarded, contributing to an increase in concentration of complex human-made substances in nature. While it is true that over time and under the right conditions plastics will oxidize, fragment and disintegrate – with continued strong growth in the use and disposal of plastics, the timeline is too short to prevent their accumulation in nature.
- The combustion of fossil fuels produces a number of **chemical compounds** (e.g. nitrogen oxides) that build up in the atmosphere.

iii. ...systematically degrading nature by physical means?

- The **extraction** of fossil fuels and virgin metals/minerals may systematically degrade nature, particularly where mining disturbs land that is not reclaimed and restored.
- Also, depending on the durability and usefulness of the promotional product, it may quickly end up in the **landfill**, adding to the degradation of land.

iv. ...systematically undermining people's ability to meet their basic human needs?

- A number of the compounds produced by the combustion of fossil fuels (e.g. nitrogen oxides, carbon monoxide, sulfur oxides, particulate matter) have a negative effect on **human health**.
- Some low cost promotional products are produced in factories in developing countries that do not meet international **labour or health and safety standards**.

5. Envision sustainable promotional products

Truly sustainable promotional products would be durable and be useful beyond just their promotional value. They would be made from renewable, recyclable and compostable materials.

For example, a sustainable writing instrument would feature:

- No components that are derived from the earth's crust (e.g. petrochemicals and metals), unless those ingredients are 100% captured and reused

- No synthetic components that are persistent in nature, unless those substances are 100% captured and reused

And a production process that:

- Does not contribute to the increased concentrations of substances from the earth's crust or the buildup of persistent compounds in nature
- Uses only sustainable renewable energy or energy produced in a carbon-neutral manner
- Does not rely on practices that systematically physically degrade land and ecosystems
- Does not rely on practices that undermine people's capacity to meet their basic needs

6. Identify and prioritize alternatives

To identify the best options to meet the services provided by furniture, review the Current Options on page one and choose the most appropriate alternative by using the following three criteria for assessment:

- a) Does the product or service move us in the right direction with regards to our four Sustainability Objectives?
- b) Does the product or service create a flexible platform for the next step toward sustainability?
- c) Is the decision financially viable?

Resources and Additional Information

1. Fair Labour Association – Workplace Code of Conduct
<http://www.fairlabor.org/our-work/labor-standards>
2. Biopolymers
<http://www.o2.org/ideas/cases/biopolymers.html>
3. Plastic Types, Characteristics, and Dangers
<https://lifewithoutplastic.com/en/plastic-types>



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