

Consumer options for sustainable products grow

by Susan C. Galentine
DECAM

Shopping is becoming even more complicated, but in a good way. When perusing products, buyers have numerous brands to choose from and now have growing options in terms of environmentally-preferable purchases.

Environmentally-preferable purchases include how the products are made, what they are made of, how they are distributed and whether or not they are recyclable. These eco-friendly products fall into all markets from alternative fuels for vehicles, organic food items, recycled-content paper and water and energy efficient washers, to name a few. What this means is that consumers can use their purchasing power to use natural resources in a more cost-effective, efficient and less polluting manner. Another way to put it is, they are sustaining resources for the future as well as preserving our environment by minimizing impacts from materials extraction and end-use waste.

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency defines environmentally-preferable purchases as those that “have a lesser or reduced effect on human health and the environment when compared with competing products or services that serve the same purpose.”

Fort Carson, as part of its sustainability program, has a number of goals that tie in to environmentally preferable purchasing and has some fledgling initiatives to move beyond basic federal purchasing requirements such as using 30 percent recycled-content copier paper.

The Directorate of Environmental Compliance and Management, Business and Administrative Services Team is tackling affirmative procurement, a subcategory of environmentally preferable purchasing geared toward the practice of buying goods made with recycled materials, in the high-volume area of paper use.

A large part of the waste generated on post is white office paper and at the DECAM alone, approximately 40,000 sheets of paper are used every month. The DECAM BAST began a three-month pilot test in April to develop a mechanism to track, reduce and recycle the amount of white office paper used. If successful, the plan could serve as a model for other Fort Carson organizations, and will provide a boost toward achieving Fort Carson’s goal to reduce waste. The three desired outcomes of the test period are:

1. Reduce the amount of paper purchased by 10 percent as compared to an average of paper purchased within the last year.
2. Increase the percentage of recycled-content in paper used in DECAM printers.
3. Increase the amount of white paper recycled by 20 percent as compared to an established base line as defined at the DECAM in April 2006.

The DECAM staff have committed to increased printing on both sides of paper when possible, are testing the use of various percentages of recycled-content paper in specified printers and are pushing for recycling all white paper, which will be weighed and tracked during the three-month test period.

Another way Fort Carson is practicing environmentally-preferable purchasing is by investing in more energy efficient, high-quality washers in the barracks facilities. The Directorate of Logistics purchased 224 Energy Star qualified washers for the 14 newly-renovated rolling pin barracks. The front-loading washers installed at the barracks use less water and energy and have had virtually no maintenance costs to date.

“Although these machines have been in use for only a short period of time I have noticed that they are some of the highest quality washer I've seen,” said Willie Pratt, who runs the Furniture Management Office for DOL.

In order for appliances to receive the Energy Star rating, they must meet energy efficiency criteria established by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency and U.S. Department of Energy. According to Energy Star, some of the benefits of investing in qualified washers include:

- Less energy use (using up to 50 percent less energy when compared to standard washers).
- Water savings (using only 18-25 gallons of water per wash load compared to up to 40 gallons of water used by a full-sized, standard wash machine).
- Reduced wear on clothing (extracting more water from clothes during the spin cycle, which reduces drying time, saves energy and reduces wear and tear on clothing).
- Capacity for larger loads (front loaded Energy Star models have no agitator, which provides more laundry washing capacity).

The trend for more environmentally-friendly products is spreading into more consumer, business and government sectors of the economy, which will make these products more affordable, increase viable alternatives, and move our society from disposable consumption to sustainable use of goods and services.

For more information on energy efficient washers and other appliances, visit the Energy Star website at http://www.energystar.gov/index.cfm?c=appliances.pr_appliances.

For more information about environmentally preferable purchasing, call the sustainability planner at 526-9777.

Cutline (photo by Susan C. Galentine): Cpl. Joshua Welsh, supply clerk for Headquarters, Headquarters Company, U.S. Army Garrison (HHC, USAG), prepares a load of laundry using an Energy Star-rated wash machine.