



## Environmentally Preferable Purchasing Guide

# Greening Your Meetings and Conferences

The “Green Meetings” train is quickly gaining speed and picking up passengers, so climb aboard! EPA has recently updated its Green Meetings Web site to accommodate this momentum, so check it out at: [www.epa.gov/oppt/greenmeetings](http://www.epa.gov/oppt/greenmeetings).

## Why Green Your Meetings?

Bringing people together for meetings, often for multiple days at a time, can create a “host” of environmental impacts—from the smog and greenhouse gas emissions associated with air and ground travel to the paper, plastic, and food waste associated with feeding attendees.

- Did you know that in Fiscal Year 2000, the federal government spent more than \$9 billion on travel for mission-related business around the world?
- Did you know that 93,000 federal employees are traveling on any given business day to 8,000 locations across the country?
- Did you know that federal travelers use 24 million room nights of hotel space in the United States annually?
- Did you know that an average hotel purchases more products in a week than 100 families purchase in an entire year?

### What's Inside:

- What Are Green Meetings?
- EPA's Purchasing Tool Suite
- Contacts & Resources
- EPA's Green Conference Initiative

## Key Sources of Waste and Pollution

The following activities associated with meetings and conferences are major sources of waste and pollution.

- **Marketing of Event and Registration**— Paper waste associated with direct mailings among organizers, speakers, attendees, and venues.
- **Travel to the Event** — Greenhouse gases and other pollutants released via planes, trains, buses, and automobiles.
- **Hotel Stays** — Water usage associated with laundering; indoor air quality issues associated with toxic building materials and cleaning products; paper, plastic, and material waste associated with single-use toiletries.
- **Food Services** — Waste from disposable coffee cups, plates, napkins, and plastic-ware; disposal of extra food; non-sustainable farming practices.
- **Exhibition Halls** — Landfill disposal of carpet; greenhouse gas emissions from shipping; waste from excess information materials and gimmicky giveaways.
- **Local Transportation** — Greenhouse gas emissions and other pollutants released from taxis or rental cars.

Produced by EPA's Environmentally Preferable Purchasing (EPP) Program, this is one in a series of purchasing guides aimed at helping procurement officials identify and purchase "greener" products and services. Check out all our EPP tools and resources at [www.epa.gov/oppt/epp](http://www.epa.gov/oppt/epp).



# What Are Green Meetings?

The Oceans Blue Foundation defines green meetings as “an assembly or gathering of people, for the purpose of the exchange of information, where, through careful planning, negative impact on the environment is minimized.” In the early 1990s, a green meeting may have meant brochures were printed on recycled-content paper or that soda cans were collected for recycling. The costs associated with even these simple steps were often prohibitive for most meeting planners and meeting service suppliers. Today, however, the opportunities to green meetings and events are almost limitless—often offering ways to save money and increase efficiency in the process.

## What Can You Do?

While there is an ever-increasing number of green meeting “pioneers” in the United States, many meeting planners are still having difficulty finding green services for their events. This is why it is important to remember that asking for green is key! Asking is the first step in showing there is a demand for reduced environmental impacts associated with a meeting. When enough meeting planners ask for reusable mugs, non-toxic cleaning services, or energy-efficient lighting, for example, then hotels, conventions centers, and other meeting service providers will begin to respond. If you are not a meeting planner, but coordinate with or direct a contractor to plan meetings for you, EPA’s Office of Pollution Prevention and Toxics has created green meeting contract language you can use when buying meeting planning support services. It is available from the Database of Environmental Information on the EPP Program’s Web site at: [www.epa.gov/oppt/epp/database.htm](http://www.epa.gov/oppt/epp/database.htm) (search under the keyword “Conference”).

The following lists of green opportunities can assist you in reducing meeting-related environmental impacts. The first list condenses the array of green opportunities into a handful of thought-provoking questions a meeting planner may consider. The second list lays out specific steps that have proven to prevent pollution and waste associated with meetings and conferences. Since a meeting planner may be restricted by time, money, and/or level of support for greening, choose the strategy that works best for your situation.

### Abbreviated List

#### Location

Have you sought a location...

- ...that, on average, minimizes the distance the attendees have to travel?
- ...where the facilities needed for your meeting are all accessible to each other, the airport, and local attractions by mass transportation options?

#### Accommodations and/or Meeting Facilities

Does the hotel and/or meeting facility you are considering...

- ...have a formal environmental policy and action plan that they will share with you?
- ...have an assigned person, group, or committee directly responsible for environmental initiatives?

#### Transportation

Does the transportation service provider you are considering...

- ...offer a carbon emission offsetting program (known as carbon-neutral travel)?
- ...offer hybrid/alternatively fueled/highly efficient vehicles?



#### Food/Beverage

Does the food and beverage service provider you are considering...

- ...maximize the use of reusable, rather than disposable, linens, flatware, glassware, etc.?
- ...donate surplus food to local shelters, soup kitchens, food banks, etc.?

#### Promotion/Marketing/Registration and Exhibitions

Have you maximized opportunities to...

- ...use electronic communication over paper as often as possible?
- ...reduce, reuse, recycle, and purchase recycled-content/energy-efficient/environmentally preferable products?

## Expanded List

### #1 Location

- Select locations that, on average, minimize the distance the attendees have to travel.
- Select locations where the facilities needed for your meeting are all accessible to each other, the airport, and local attractions by mass transportation options.
- Get a sense of the availability of green services in cities under consideration. Some cities or regions of the country are further along in their awareness and protection of the environment and will make it easier for you to green your meeting.

### #2 Accommodations

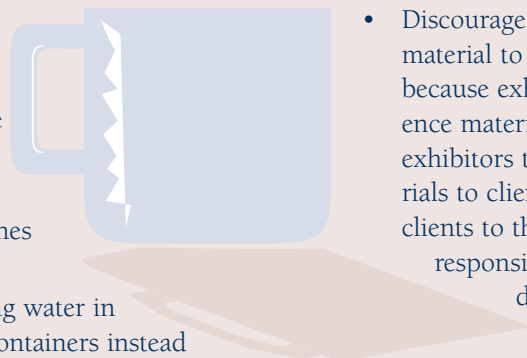
- Select accommodations that allow for efficient transportation routes (walking paths, bicycle paths, public transportation).
- Choose a hotel that has energy and water conservation programs, including: automatic controls for the HVAC system; fluorescent lighting and automatic lighting controls; and low-flow taps, showerheads, and toilets.
- Make certain that there are recycling and waste minimization programs in place. Specifically, find out what items are recycled. Are recycling bins placed in all guestrooms?
- Donate used amenities (soap, bottles, etc.) to charitable organizations or recycle them.
- Give hotel guests the option to reuse towels and sheets.
- Utilize paperless check-in, checkout, and billing procedures to minimize use of paper.

### #3 Transportation

- Locate meetings and accommodations within walking distance of each other and area restaurants and attractions, so excessive car travel is minimized.
- Provide shuttle services between meetings, accommodations, and restaurants to minimize car and taxi trips if walking isn't feasible.

### #4 Food & Beverage

- Use cloth instead of paper napkins, and reusable plates, cups, and silverware instead of disposables.
- Serve sugar, creamers, and condiments in reusable dishes rather than packets.
- Consider providing drinking water in pitchers or large reusable containers instead of small plastic bottles.



- Donate surplus food when possible to local shelters and food banks.
- Plan menus around abundant, locally produced ingredients.

### #5 Meeting Facilities

- Look for facilities that invite meeting attendees to share in energy conservation and waste reduction efforts—for example, by reducing paper towels, supporting use of soap dispensers versus individual soaps, avoiding waste, and participating in recycling programs.
- Look for meeting rooms with recycling bins, posted with a list of all items that can be recycled.
- Put recycling containers in visible locations at entrances to halls and in the pre-function area. Let attendees know that recycling containers will be available. Place visible signage instructing delegates as to what is and is not recyclable. Put additional containers in hotel lobbies near checkout areas.



### #6 Exhibitions

- Use signage that is reusable whenever possible.
- Reduce paper use by putting floor plans and exhibitor service kit items on your Web site when practical (and/or the decorator's Web site).
- Work with the shipping firm and decorator to minimize packing materials and to use recyclable, biodegradable shipping and packing materials, such as paper and corrugated boxes instead of polystyrene and plastic wrap.
- Incorporate community service into the exhibition. Ask exhibitors to donate leftover flowers, giveaways such as trinkets, pencils, or T-shirts, or other booth decorations or items that would normally be thrown away to local shelters, hospitals, or schools. Set up areas for exhibitors to drop off reusable items at the end of the show.
- Discourage exhibitors from bringing large quantities of material to the show, which often end up in the trash because exhibitors don't want to ship unused conference materials back at the end of the show. Encourage exhibitors to bring small quantities and then mail materials to clients from their offices after the show or refer clients to their Web site. Also, useful environmentally responsible gifts are preferable to items that will be discarded at the end of the show.

## #7 General Office Practices and Communications

- Reduce paper by allowing attendees to register online. Confirm registration by e-mail when possible.
- Recycle paper inserts and plastic badges.
- Use double-sided copies.
- Print marketing and registration materials (whenever possible) on recycled paper using soy-based ink.
- Promote electronic distribution instead of printed handouts to reduce paper usage.
- Encourage use of electronic presentations and distributing disk handouts to eliminate paper waste.
- Do not use mailing lists that have not been maintained. A mailing list more than 2 years old is usually unreliable.
- Provide information about the meeting and destination to potential attendees and allow them to register via e-mail.
- Set up a system for making photocopies on demand instead of over-printing materials.
- Post minutes or other handouts on the Internet, or circulate them electronically after the meeting.

## EPA's Purchasing Tool Suite

EPA's EPP Program has developed the following Web-based tools to help purchasers consider the environment, along with price and performance, when buying a product or service.

### EPP Database of Environmental Information on Products and Services

[www.epa.gov/oppt/epp/database.htm](http://www.epa.gov/oppt/epp/database.htm)

A searchable database of product-specific information (e.g., environmental standards and guidelines or contract language) developed by government programs, both domestic and international, as well as third parties.

### EPP General Training Tool

[www.epa.gov/oppt/epp/gentt/](http://www.epa.gov/oppt/epp/gentt/)

Covers basic EPP principles and mandates, along with some more in-depth applications of EPP, in an entertaining and multimedia format.

### Promising Practices Guide for Greener Contracts

[www.epa.gov/oppt/epp/ppg/](http://www.epa.gov/oppt/epp/ppg/)

A series of short case studies highlighting successful strategies for incorporating environmental factors into a variety of product and service contracts.

## It's Policy

The federal government has undertaken various initiatives to mandate the consideration of the environment in purchasing decisions. A growing number of state and local governments also have implemented green purchasing policies or programs. In 1995, EPA established the Environmentally Preferable Purchasing (EPP) Program to encourage federal employees to consider a broad range of environmental factors, such as reduced toxicity and lower volatile organic compound (VOC) content, in their purchasing decisions. In 1997, the Federal Acquisition Regulation (FAR), which provides broad purchasing guidance to federal employees, was amended to support federal procurement of green products and services. In addition, executive agencies, under Executive Order 13101, have been directed to identify and give preference to the purchase of products and services that pose fewer environmental burdens.

# Contacts and Resources

## **Fairmont Hotels & Resorts EcoMeet Program**

[www.fairmont.com](http://www.fairmont.com)

Fairmont Hotels & Resorts is the largest luxury hotel company in North America, with a distinctive collection of properties and a worldwide reputation for excellence and environmental responsibility. It has developed an environmental program recognized as the most comprehensive in the North American hotel industry. The EcoMeet Program is a product option designed specifically for meeting planners—it allows them to order a ready-made green meeting when organizing through the Fairmont Hotel chain. All of the greening initiatives available at the Fairmont Hotels are automatically incorporated into the meeting events when this “EcoMeet Program” is chosen. Greening initiatives include, but are not limited to, transportation alternatives, environmentally friendly meals and meeting facilities, and incorporating environmental educational opportunities for meeting attendees.

## **Oceans Blue Foundation**

[www.oceansblue.org](http://www.oceansblue.org)

Oceans Blue Foundation (OBF) was the first to develop guidelines for green meetings and has since developed a primer to provide guidance on applying environmentally sustainable principles in the meetings and conventions industry. These tools are designed for use by planners, suppliers, and delegates of meetings, conventions, conferences, and trade shows, as well as by the operators of the facilities that hold such events. OBF now will work with EPA and other international stakeholders to develop a Web-based tool to help meeting planners plan green meetings.

## **Green Seal — Environmental Standard for Lodging Properties, GS-33**

[www.greenseal.org](http://www.greenseal.org)

Green Seal is an independent, nonprofit organization dedicated to protecting the environment by promoting the manufacture and sale of environmentally responsible consumer products. Green Seal sets environmental standards and awards a Green Seal of Approval to products that cause less harm to the environment than other similar products. Green Seal has partnered with the lodging industry, the nation's second-largest employer, to support ecotourism. Its campaign to educate hotels and motels focuses on how environmental efforts improve the bottom line and benefit the environment. Green Seal received wide input from the lodging industry on its Environmental Standard for Lodging Properties. Green Seal also has certified lodging properties in Pennsylvania and Washington, D.C. Government employees are encouraged to stay in certified properties when they travel on official business, and government meetings are encouraged to use these facilities.

## **The Coalition for Environmentally Responsible Economies (CERES) Green Hotel Initiative**

[www.ceres.org/about/Programs/ghoverview.html](http://www.ceres.org/about/Programs/ghoverview.html)

The Coalition for Environmentally Responsible Economies (CERES) is a nonprofit coalition of investors, public pension funds, foundations, religious and public interest groups, and labor unions working in partnership with companies toward the common goal of corporate environmental responsibility worldwide. CERES convened a network of environmental organizations, governmental entities, and businesses that advocate corporate responsibility to initiate a collaborative project to promote environmentally friendly hotels. The initiative will encourage corporate and government purchasers to ask for greener hotels as part of their business travel, creating an incentive for more hotels to “go green.”

## **Hotel Association of Canada — Green Leaf Eco-Rating Program**

[www.hotels.ca/programs/index.html](http://www.hotels.ca/programs/index.html)

Founded in 1913, the Hotel Association of Canada (HAC) is the national organization representing the accommodation industry in Canada. Its membership encompasses the provincial and territorial hotel associations, the corporate hotel chains, independent hotels, motels and resorts, and the many suppliers to the hotel industry. Their objective is to assist both our national and international members as they enhance their competitiveness and improve their bottom line. HAC has developed and maintained the Green Leaf Eco-Rating Program for the Canadian hotel industry. The program involves a graduated rating system designed to recognize hotels, motels, and resorts committed to improving their environmental performance. The program recognizes a hotel's achievements through the award of one to five Green Leafs; one leaf is given for a basic commitment to environmental principles, and two through five leaves are awarded for specific results achieved.

## **NW Pollution Prevention Resource Center—Hospitality Sector**

[www.pprc.org/pprc/pubs/topics/hosptlty.html](http://www.pprc.org/pprc/pubs/topics/hosptlty.html)

## **Meeting Professionals International—Green Meeting Task Force**

[www.mpiweb.org/resources/greenmeetings/default.htm](http://www.mpiweb.org/resources/greenmeetings/default.htm)

## **The Green Hotel in the Green Mountain State Program**

[www.vtgreenhotels.org](http://www.vtgreenhotels.org)

# EPA's Green Conference Initiative

[www.epa.gov/oppt/greenmeetings](http://www.epa.gov/oppt/greenmeetings)

EPA's Green Conference Initiative was developed to provide meeting planners and suppliers of meeting services with easy access to green options and opportunities for meeting planning. The goal of this initiative is to develop a "one-stop shop" at which meeting planning and service providers can gather information on the topic of green meetings. The information is meant to help planners request—and suppliers provide—green options for meeting planning. The Web site includes a checklist of opportunities that, when applied, minimize the environmental impacts of holding meetings; contract language for obtaining greener meeting planning/support services; and links to information on other related initiatives.

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Environmental Protection Agency  
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