

BASQUE ENVIRONMENTAL MANAGEMENT AUTHORITY (IHOBE), SPAIN

Procurement objectives

Ihobe's GPP activities and policies are tied in closely with the Basque Programme for the Promotion of Ecodesign (2004-2006), which established a means for organising a pre-procurement dialogue process with potential suppliers in the region to prepare the groundwork for tendering processes. A tender was carried out in 2006 for office furniture with a total contract value of €134,000. The interaction between Ihobe and Basque furniture companies on ecodesign ensured that the market in the region was ready to present environmentally ambitious offers in response to the call for tender.

Background

Ihobe is a public body within Ministry of Environment, Land Use Planning, Agriculture and Fishing of the Basque Government. It works to improve the environment in the Basque Country in cooperation with all government levels. Since 2005, Ihobe has been actively encouraging and putting green procurement into practice within its own operations, using a strategy which specifically involves stimulating both supply and demand side actors in the region.



Criteria used

The main sustainability criteria included in the tendering process for office furniture focus on sustainable production, use of recycled materials and recyclability of the end product, and are summarised as follows:

1) **Technical and environmental quality of the materials**

Boards made of timber and wood by-products: Lowest possible quantity of formaldehyde; exclude dangerous substances (as classified by [Directive 67/548/EEC](#)) and use timber originating from a sustainably managed forest (reference to criteria from [FSC](#) and [PEFC](#) labels) or recycled.

Plastic components: Products containing previously recycled plastic will be preferred and plastic pieces should be marked according to [ISO 11469](#) (or equivalent) above a certain weight; substances based on lead, cadmium, mercury or its compounds should not be added to plastic materials.

Metal parts: Must be easily dismantled at the end of the products' life cycle in order to be recycled; inclusion of recycled (second fusion) metals will be preferred.

Upholstery: Preference will be given to products meeting criteria from [Öko-tex](#), the [EU Flower](#) or equivalent

Foam: Preference will be given to fulfilment of [CertiPUR](#) criteria or equivalent.

2) **Technical quality of the products**

Focuses on having standardised assembly connections of pieces, modularity and ergonomics (for chairs).

3) **Environmental quality of the products**

Requirements regarding durability (minimum guarantee of at least three years); maintenance – for example, cleaning of products should be possible without the use of organic solvents; and products shall be fit for recycling and re-use.

Results

Four companies submitted bids which fulfilled all the compulsory requirements (technical specifications). In the award phase, more points were given to those offers that addressed the following two aspects:

- Life cycle analysis for some or all the offered products
- Environmental product declarations

Regarding environmental criteria, all companies but one presented the requested documentation. The least expensive offer, in terms of financial cost, was awarded the contract. This was also the offer that obtained the highest environmental point score.

This tender procedure has served to inspire and inform similar action in the region by other public sector actors. For instance, in 2008 the Basque Water Authority adopted a very similar approach to Ihobe to procure office furniture for their new office block. The City of Bilbao has also implemented a very similar approach.

Environmental impacts

The main environmental impact of furniture generally stems from the production and treatment of the raw materials used in the manufacturing stage, rather than from the production of the furniture itself. For instance, loss of biodiversity, soil erosion and degradation are caused by unsustainable forest management and illegal logging for wood and wood by-products.

Ecodesign is an approach used for the design of commercial products, where the environmental impact is taken into account during the product's development process. This is considered in addition to 'traditional' issues addressed, such as cost and quality. Ecodesign principles aim to reduce the environmental impact of the product throughout its life cycle. The approach can be applied to any type of product, no matter how complex it is, and it can be applied to new products or to the redesign of existing products. Ecodesign can be included in the GPP repertoire of requirements, thereby encouraging manufacturers to include these into their production planning and processes to match tender requirements. Further information is available on the [Ecodesign website](#).

Lessons learned

Lessons learned from the experience are summarised as follows:

- Importance of consulting internal experts - When developing the tender, Ihobe had technical experts in its team working on eco-design activities, which greatly facilitated the tender preparation process and the assessment of the bids presented, especially the supporting documents.
- Knowledge of the market situation and companies from the field is vital
- It is feasible to require certain environmental criteria as obligatory instead of as voluntary

Overall, this tender supported the argument that **environmental products are not more expensive than non-green** products. It also identified future fields of action for Ihobe to work on with all companies from the sector, in order to improve their behaviour, namely regarding recycled materials (steel, aluminium and plastics) and sustainable timber certification.

For more information, please see European GPP criteria for furniture – [product sheet](#) and [background report](#).