

Green Procurement of cleaning products

City of Ghent (Belgium)

Background

Located in the Flemish region of Belgium, Ghent is the capital and largest city of the East Flanders province. With more than 250,000 inhabitants, Ghent is Belgium's second largest municipality.

Since 2008, the City of Ghent has in place an action plan for sustainability, [Ghent 2020](#), which includes more than 105 actions and initiatives to make Ghent a more sustainable city, including sustainable procurement activities. A first Procurement strategy with a deep-rooted focus on sustainability was launched in 2012. In 2014, this strategy was renewed in accordance with the adapted priorities set forth by the newly elected city council. During the [EcoProcura 2014](#) conference, held in Ghent, this strategy (read more, [in Dutch](#)) was formally signed by the Mayor.

Procurement objectives

Ghent has spent the last 10 years progressively greening its municipal cleaning services to achieve the use of 100% environmentally sound products. Ghent purchases products meeting the [European Ecolabel](#) criteria, as a minimum, and was the first city to use [Cradle-to-Cradle Certified](#) products through their contracted cleaning services for all of its buildings and facilities. There are 340 locations in the city (ranging from office buildings, schools, nurseries, museums, etc.) which benefit from the City's cleaning services and/or products (such as those used for providing public catering services), which involve 350 external collaborators. The City's annual spend on cleaning products and services is 14.4 million euro.

Criteria used

The most recent public procurement contract was awarded in September 2016 following an Open Procedure. A four-year framework agreement for the supply of cleaning and polishing products was established. Details regarding sustainability criteria included are as follows:

Subject matter:

Framework agreement for the provision of cleaning products, environmentally friendly cleaning products and various sanitary supplies.

The City of Ghent acts as a central purchasing centre for a number of other public bodies in Ghent, which are the potential customers of the cleaning supplies contract, such as the local police, welfare centres, etc.



Technical criteria (phrased as *special performance requirements for environmental sustainability* in the tender):

The technical criteria specified below apply to 16 categories of cleaning products, ranging from floor cleaners, detergents, toilet paper to hand soaps.

- The proposed products must be biodegradable, in accordance with [EU Directive 73/404/EEC](#) and [73/405/EEC](#).
- The products supplied must meet the criteria related to obtaining the [European Ecolabel](#), for the particular product category in question, or equivalent.

The following groups of products (a, b and c) must also be made available in the product catalogue provided by the winning bidder (more information about the product catalogue is available further below):

- a) Pro-biotic cleaning (or cleaning agents containing bacterial action) for cleaning of hard surfaces.
- b) [Cradle-to-Cradle \(C2C\)](#) cleaning products – products that meet the criteria of the [C2C 'bronze' label](#), or equivalent.
- c) Cradle-to-cradle hygiene products (e.g. soap) – the requirements are the same as for point b).

Labelling:

Each product must have an appropriate label which includes instructions on dosage, information on safety and acidity/basicity (pH) (in Dutch).

Dosing systems, concentrates and refills: All products offered should be fitted with appropriate dosage dispenser aids. Working with refill packs is essential. Empty containers should be taken back free of charge by the supplier. The supplier must provide evidence that the material taken back is recycled during the implementation of the contract.

Training:

An initial training session, at no further cost, should be provided for all cleaning staff of the City of Ghent (at the City's premises), and staff from the other local entities buying from the contract, addressing the range of products on offer and how they should be used. The training must take place not later than six months following the commencement of the contract. The tenderer should provide that, if necessary, these sessions are repeated as refreshers (annually) for existing staff or as an introduction for new employees (on request, several times a year).

Award criteria:

The most economically advantageous tender was awarded the contract based on the following:

1. Price – 70% of total points
2. Sustainability - 30% in total. This was split into three categories:
 - a) Sustainable transport - CO₂ emissions of vehicle fleet (10 points):

Ghent attaches great importance to sustainable transport and thus seeks to encourage suppliers to deliver goods in a (near) CO₂-neutral way as possible. Companies were awarded extra points if they could prove the use of vehicles with a lower environmental impact.

To assess the sustainability of the transport used, Ghent proposed a number of conditions:

- Deliveries made exclusively by vehicles meeting a minimum [emission standard of EURO 5](#) or higher (including EURO 6, enhanced environmentally-friendly vehicle (EEV), hybrid, electric, compressed natural gas (CNG), etc.).
- As part of their bids, tenderers were asked to submit an exhaustive list of vehicles to be used for the deliveries; including also the EURO emission standard and/or type of fuel used per vehicle. Vehicles not included in the list could not be used for executing the contract.
- New vehicles ordered before the date of opening of tenders could be included in the list.
- Emissions standards were weighted as follows: Points are awarded from EURO V standard upwards, with the most points (that is, four points) given to CNG fuelled or electric hybrid. The points were determined based on the average scores awarded to the vehicles in the fleet of the tenderer.

b) Sustainable waste management (10 points):

The City of Ghent aims to have the most sustainable treatment of waste generated from the goods that it purchases as possible. Waste should be prevented by limiting it as much as possible or through re-use. For unavoidable waste, a sustainable process, with an emphasis on recycling should be used. The supplier is responsible (at its own expense) to take back all packaging.

If the supplier has intensified its efforts or innovative methods for reducing and/or minimising waste, extra points will be awarded. These efforts shall not affect other provisions of the tender requirements and must be an added value to the provisions for waste which are already included in the specifications, be feasible and actually carried out during the term of the contract.

Each extra or innovative method undertaken will be awarded one point, with a maximum of 10 points possible.

c) Sustainability - Other elements/proposals on innovative and sustainable operations, products, services, etc. (10 points):

These may not include elements/proposals that are part of 'future' operations and must be directly relevant for implementing the current contract with the City of Ghent. For each element/proposal for innovative action/product/service, one point will be awarded, with a maximum of 10 points possible.

All efforts in these areas (points a), b) and c)) must have a direct positive impact on the current contract, otherwise they will not be considered during the contract award phase.

Results

The estimated total value of the contract is 400,000 euro per year (excluding VAT) or 1,600,000 euro at the end of the four-year period. Two companies supply the products under the contract.

In terms of the fulfilment of the contract award criteria related to sustainability, Ghent's cleaning products are delivered using vehicles meeting the emission standard EURO 6. In terms of waste, packaging uses 85% recycled cardboard; plastic bottles made from polyethylene high-density (PEHD) - a polyethylene thermoplastic made from petroleum - is 100% recyclable and consists of 10% recycled PEHD; whilst for PET (polyethylene terephthalate), the material is 100% recyclable and new bottles are made from 81% recycled materials. Dispensers for dishwashing detergent are also provided, resulting in less packaging and enabling for more correct/accurate dosages of the product during use.

Finally, in terms of other innovative sustainable proposals, a fully automatic smart dosage system was provided. The device does the follow up of different parameters like temperature, when the detergent is empty, how often the dishwasher's water tank requires filling, etc. This system can deliver reports on a daily basis, enabling better monitoring with the aim of improving on savings related to energy, water use and waste. Other innovative products, such as a dosage bottle with an anti-spilling system were also supplied (these are cradle-to-cradle gold certified). The market in Belgium for environmentally-friendly cleaning products and services has changed considerably over the last 10 years. During this time, the City of Ghent has worked intensively with its suppliers and potential suppliers, by communicating its needs and sustainability goals, etc. Ghent believes that this has positively influenced the availability of new ecological products and methods on the market. Suppliers/companies (also those that the city council is not in contact with) are continuously interested in presenting (and testing) new solutions in this area to the City.

Environmental Impacts

Generally speaking, the key impacts from the life cycle of cleaning products relate to impacts on human health, ecotoxicity, eutrophication, water consumption and waste generation. These impacts can best be reduced by minimising the energy consumed in heating the water used during the cleaning process, excluding or limiting certain substances in the products used, applying correct product doses, optimising the way a cleaning service is performed, and minimising product packaging.

Lessons learned

- The challenges are in formulating the technical specifications. It is important to define them in the most accurate and specific way possible, which, however, still provides enough room for suppliers to offer the best/most suitable products and services they have available.
- The keys to success is the follow up work done once the contract is in place; creating a cooperative relationship with suppliers; testing out new products and techniques; and translating the lessons learned into subsequent (new) tenders.

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For related information, please see European GPP criteria (currently under revision) for [Cleaning Products and Services](#) and the [Technical Background Report](#).