

Ireland Makes Sustainable Furniture Purchasing Work

THE OFFICE OF PUBLIC WORKS, IRELAND

Procurement objectives

The Irish Government's policy of decentralisation of Government Departments has led to the construction and fitting-out of several new offices outside of Dublin. For this reason, public sector procurement of furniture has significantly increased in recent years. Such procurement is largely the responsibility of the Furniture Division of the Office of Public Works (OPW), which has concluded approximately 200 contracts in the years 2007-2010. The value of these contracts is up to 10 million Euros a year.

Background

The OPW has been working to increase the sustainability of its furniture and other purchases over the past ten years. All products purchased conform to all EU and international environmental standards and directives. As early as 2003, the OPW commissioned an independent accredited test consultancy to carry out an environmental impact assessment on its furniture specification. As a result, from 2003 tendering processes have included the possibility of additional points for contractors who can demonstrate that their goods and processes are environmentally preferable.



Criteria used

Subject matter: Procurement of office furniture for state offices and departments

Technical specifications:

Baseboard: Chipboard used must be Furniture E1 Grade. Glues and resins used must give rise to low formaldehyde emissions only, and must be consistent with emission class E1, as per [European Norm](#) BS EN 312:2003 or similar standard.

Finishes: Veneers must have been manufactured without the use of biocides or emissions of biocides to waters. All panels are to be balanced with approved backing veneer. All edge lippings must be 2.5mm minimum solid wood lippings.

Lacquers and Varnishes: Acid-curing lacquers are to be avoided, unless they are low volatile organic compound (VOC) and low formaldehyde emitting. UV curing lacquers and water-based lacquers are to be used where possible. All finishes must be in accordance with [FIRA Standard](#) 6250, or equivalent.

Adhesives: Glues must have low VOC content (approximately 10% or less); must not give rise to formaldehyde emissions.

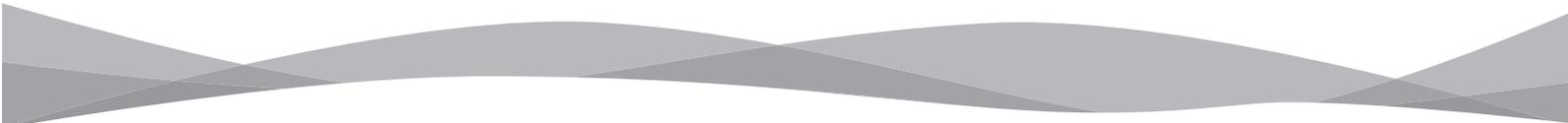
In addition, contractors are required to demonstrate their compliance with the OPW's timber sustainability requirements. All wood used must come from legal and sustainable sources. Contractors must avoid sourcing illegally logged timber in accordance with the EU Action Plan for Forest Law Enforcement, Governance and Trade ([FLEGT](#)). Endangered species covered by the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora ([CITES](#)) must not be used. Contractors are required to demonstrate their compliance with these timber sustainability requirements.

Award criteria: A number of points are awarded under the general heading of 'Sustainability', with the supplier invited to indicate the precise steps they will take to reduce the environmental impact associated with delivery of the requirements.

Contract Performance Clauses: Contractors must employ good environmental practices on site with regard to waste reduction, waste recovery, minimisation of packaging, use of recoverable packaging materials, control of environmental emissions, and the efficient use of materials and transport. Contractors must also take adequate measures to limit occupational exposure to hazardous substances.

Results

The Furniture Division has experienced no increase in costs as a result of their GPP policies. Costs have in fact come down, for various reasons, including general market conditions. Overall, suppliers themselves have saved money through enhancing the environmental profile of their products and activities, and some of these savings have been passed on to the buyers. Overall, it is felt that suppliers have reacted well to the use of a "carrot rather than stick" approach, where specific proposals for ways in which the environmental impact of furniture supply can be reduced have been encouraged progressively, rather than restrictive or difficult-to-comply-with specifications being adopted without consultation.



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Environmental impacts

The inclusion of sustainability considerations in the tender process has led to a number of improved environmental practices amongst suppliers – some of which now extend beyond the specific contracts awarded. One supplier began delivering the goods wrapped in blankets, rather than using plastic-based wrapping. Use of such recoverable packaging materials is now standard practice for all of the Furniture Division's suppliers. Another company now shreds its hardwood waste materials for use in its own heating system. There has also been a large shift from the use of acid-curing lacquers to lacquers which are water-based – an example of a general change in supplier practices driven by public sector demand.

Lessons learned

Like the other GPP elements of the Furniture Division's procurement practices, requirements with respect to legal and sustainable timber are constantly evolving. In 2003, additional points could be allocated to suppliers using FSC or equivalent certification. Today, the OPW accepts a number of the existing commercial certification systems for verification purposes – namely: [CSA](#); [FSC](#); [PEFC](#); and [SFI](#). Other sources and forms of proof and verification may also be submitted. Such sources or forms of verification should take the form of "verification of source" under EU public procurement rules and include an appropriate chain of custody standard; the requirements for the protection of endangered species; and independent assurances of sustainable forestry practices.

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