

REGION VÄSTRA GÖTALAND, SWEDEN

Background

The Region of Västra Götaland's (VGR) procurement of furniture amounts to over €10 million annually – VGR is one of Sweden's largest purchasers. Ten years ago, only a tiny fraction of furniture and fabrics for public buildings and offices on the market were eco-label certified. In order to change this, a project called Considerate Design was launched in 2002. The project has been a source of knowledge and inspiration on how to combine design with sustainable development. Initially, furniture manufacturers and suppliers were visited - individually or at commercial fairs - to discuss environmental aspects and eco-certification of products. This resulted in the launch of 25 projects where VGR teamed up with manufacturers to develop prototypes that met criteria for accessibility and the environment. When the new procurement term began in 2006, around 40 products had been improved to meet criteria certified by eco-labels.

Procurement objectives

Interior furniture and textile products have substantial impacts on health and the environment. VGR utilises GPP to influence manufacturers and suppliers to provide furniture which meet certain eco-label criteria. These green products in the furniture contract are known as the Green List.

In 2012, VGR met their target of more than 50% of their volume of furniture purchases being from the [Green List](#).

Criteria used

The Green List covers three product segments: office furniture, office chairs, and furniture for public spaces as well as fabrics/textiles (upholstery and curtains). As a basis, all suppliers must meet the [Swedish Environmental Management Council's](#) (SEMCo) sustainability criteria. For furniture, these include minimum requirements regarding the use of cellulose material, flame retardants, glue, surface treatment, textiles and leather. Other aspects considered are material recycling, accessibility of replacement components, environmental impact of the product, and social conditions during manufacture.

To qualify for the Green List, products must also meet the more advanced criteria of the [Nordic Swan eco-label](#) for furniture and fitments. Their criteria for furniture and fitments are based on the life-cycle assessment of the product and related manufacturing, use and disposal. Nordic Swan certification places more stringent demands on timber origin, recycled plastic and metal, less use of environmental and hazardous materials, durability and recyclability.

Results

Since the launch of the project in 2002, the share of products meeting eco-label criteria have been steadily increasing. In 2008, eco-labelled products accounted for 33% of the purchase value, with the figure increasing to 41% a year later. A milestone was reached in 2012 when Green List products represented more than half (57%) of the value of all products purchased by VGR for the first time; including over 450 products. A new procurement is organised every three to four years. The contract specifies what products are included, where the Green List is one of included product groups.

The Green List has influenced the furniture market in several ways and has created a win-win situation for both suppliers and buyers of greener products, by making it more attractive for companies to fulfil eco-label demands and for third party auditing. Furthermore, the Green List approach has boosted knowledge and green ambitions in the furniture industry, and has played a strong role in advancing the environmental maturity of the market in Sweden, at least. This is greening the market beyond the scope of VGR's purchasing power. Other regions and counties in Sweden use the Green List as a role model for GPP of products for interiors and textiles.

In terms of VGR's own contracts, at present, two companies are contracted to supply office furniture and interior textiles. One of them, a manufacturer, is providing 100% eco-labelled products for office furniture. The second, a retail company provides a fraction of its products from the Green List. In spite of this, about a third of products actually sold to VGR are Green List products - evidence that employees use the Green List actively to select products when they order from the contract.

Environmental impacts

Among the effects of more products meeting the Nordic Swan criteria are:

- i) more sustainable management of forests ([FSC](#) or [PEFC](#) certified),
- ii) less use of virgin metals (use of recycled metals),
- iii) larger share of renewable energy used during production, and
- iv) less use of hazardous chemicals.

Lessons learned

- One of the main factors for success was the collaboration with companies in the interior design industry. These companies and their designers were trained in sustainable development, and inspired one another to develop prototypes that were tested by employees in these environments. This new way of working continued after the initial goals were reached. It was crucial to allocate sufficient time and resources to guide and train both companies (that is, potential suppliers) and procurement staff to understand and make use of the Green List tool.
- Many products do not qualify to meet the Green List criteria at present because of conflicting product standards. For instance, where some VGR premises require fabrics to meet high flame resistance standards. In these cases users are referred to curtains made of a synthetic material (Trevira CS) - a product disqualified from the Green List because of its mode of production and the large amount of antimony present in the fabric.