



# SUSTAINABLE PURCHASING QUICK GUIDE: SAFER GENERAL BUILDING PRODUCTS

*Ecology Center and Safer States' Sustainable Purchasing Quick Guides are a series of fact sheets highlighting sustainable purchasing options for high volume, high impact products. They are designed to help cities, counties, and states create safer communities through the purchase of more environmentally and socially conscious products.*

## Why Building Products?

The materials used in buildings can have profound impacts on human health and the environment. For example, some paints and sealants can contain toxic VOCs, tiles can contain lead, vinyl flooring can contain toxic additives, and spray foam can contain dangerous isocyanates. Not only are the materials hazardous in use and disposal, the extraction and processing of new materials can also threaten human health and the environment. When selecting building products, understanding the origin and contents of the materials provides some assurance that products used don't threaten human health and the environment.

## Solutions: Municipalities Taking Action

Municipalities are taking steps to use more sustainable products in their buildings. San Francisco [requires](#) building materials to meet the EPA's [procurement guidelines](#) and prohibits use of all PVC products. New York City created the [Minimum Standards for Construction Products](#), a set of specifications for building construction and facility maintenance products. It identifies minimum standards for a wide range of building products and requires third-party certifications when readily available. The [Design Requirements and Guidelines](#) developed by Massachusetts' Bureau of Housing Development and Construction provides requirements for a range of building materials, including low or no VOC paints and formaldehyde-free fiberboard used for cabinetry and countertops.

## Benefits

Being conscientious of the origin and contents of building materials helps protect both human and environmental health without compromising on either. Purchasing building products with materials that are less toxic and more sustainable reduces the harm to building occupants and the planet.

## Tools and Resources

- [Ecology Center's Directory of Sustainable Purchasing: Buildings](#); Directory of resources for building material purchasing
- [HomeFree's Product Guidance](#); Ranking system and guidance for purchasing healthier building products
- [Enterprise Green Communities Criteria: Materials](#); Criteria for purchasing healthy and sustainable building and construction materials