



SUSTAINABLE PURCHASING QUICK GUIDE: INTERIOR FURNISHINGS, CARPETING, AND FLOORING

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 Interior Furnishings, Carpeting, and Flooring?

Furnishings, carpet, and flooring are both essential and in constant contact with occupants. But sometimes, those furnishings, carpet, and flooring can contain chemicals of concern that pose a threat to occupants and the environment. These products can contain formaldehyde or other volatile organic compounds (VOCs), antimicrobials, flame retardants, phthalates, PFAS, or other hazardous content. Toxic chemicals can migrate out of furnishing and flooring into dust, air, and ecosystems during their life cycle. Evidence suggests exposure to these chemicals can irritate or damage the respiratory system, pose threats to the reproductive, immune, or nervous systems, or threaten the body's endocrine or messaging system. They have also been linked to other long-lasting health problems, including cancer. Purchasing healthier alternatives that don't contain harmful chemicals can protect the health of occupants and the environment.

Solutions: Municipalities Taking Action

Many municipalities are protecting health and the environment by purchasing safer furniture, carpet, and flooring. San Francisco restricts the purchase of [upholstered furniture](#) and [carpeting](#) containing antimicrobials, flame retardants, PFAS, PVC, and VOCs. The City also restricts the [purchase of resilient flooring and adhesives](#) to products that meet a select list of third-party certifications. The [State of New York](#) requires furniture to be free of PFAS, antimicrobials, and phthalates and restricts the purchase of products containing PVC and flame retardants. The State also prohibits the [purchase of floor coverings](#) that contain antimicrobials, flame retardants, or PVCs. The [State of Minnesota](#) has a preference for furniture meeting similar criteria. The entire [University of California system](#) also adopted similar criteria.

Benefits

A [study](#) conducted by the Harvard T.H. Chan School of Public Health has directly demonstrated the benefits of using safer furnishings and carpet. Buildings renovated with healthier furnishings and carpet had significantly lower levels of the entire group of per- and polyfluoralkyl substances ([PFAS](#))—toxic chemicals linked with many negative health effects—than buildings with conventional furnishings. One researcher said, "Our findings provide desperately needed scientific evidence for the success of healthier materials—which don't have to be more expensive or perform less well—as a real-world solution to reduce indoor exposure to forever chemicals as a whole."

Tools and Resources

- [Center for Environmental Health's Healthier Furniture Purchasing Guide](#); Database of furniture free of key chemicals of concern
- Health Care Without Harm's Healthy [Interiors](#), [Flooring](#), and [Carpeting](#) Webpages; Include guidance and criteria for manufacturers and product lists
- [HomeFree's Flooring Product Guidance](#); General guidance and ranking system for safer flooring
- [Enterprise Green Communities Criteria: Materials](#); Criteria for purchasing healthy and sustainable materials