

## **Best Practices for Carpet Purchasing and Recycling**

Carpets and rugs cover 70% of U.S. floors, according to the Carpet and Rug Institute. Carpet lifecycle impacts include chemical emissions from manufacturing, depletion of petroleum and other natural resources, transportation, indoor air quality impacts from off gassing, and disposal costs at landfills and recycling operations. Choosing carpet that minimizes these impacts is especially important given the relatively large amount of carpeting used in the United States as well as its relatively short useful lifetime.<sup>i</sup> The Carpet America Recovery Effort (CARE) estimates some 2.5 million tons of carpet is disposed each year in the U.S.<sup>ii</sup> In Seattle and King County alone, some 50,000 tons of carpet are disposed in landfills each year!<sup>iii</sup>

Recycling carpet for tenant improvements, remodels, and demolition projects reduces environmental impacts. The carbon footprint associated with carpet is greatly minimized by recycling it, and recycling carpet is necessary to produce recycled-content carpet products. In fact, recycling one ton of used carpet reduces greenhouse gas emissions by about 5,000 pounds of carbon dioxide equivalent, equivalent to emissions from burning about 300 gallons of gasoline.<sup>iv</sup> Seattle and King County are leading a regional effort to grow carpet recycling efforts in the Northwest and create a market for products made from recycled carpet.

The purpose of this fact sheet is to provide businesses with tools and strategies to make smart, sustainable purchasing and disposal choices related to carpet.

### **Frequently Asked Questions:**

#### **Is carpet that contains recycled content more expensive?**

Recycled carpet, like other recycled-content products, does not necessarily cost more. Products containing recycled materials are now commonly available. Features, such as design trends, customer popularity, and shipping costs are likely to influence the price. Also, more demand from buyers can lead to lower carpet prices. Specialty products that contain higher levels of recycled content may cost more. However, cooperative purchasing by companies and public agencies offer opportunities to negotiate better pricing.

#### **What should I think about before purchasing sustainable carpet?**

- Consider costs beyond the upfront purchase price. “Cradle to cradle” or “life-cycle” analyses take into account the full impacts of your choices, and the range of options for healthy, environmental, and economical decisions.
- Every purchase has health and environmental impacts. Work with manufacturers and suppliers, as well as with property owners and maintenance managers to choose less-toxic, more recyclable, and locally-manufactured products. You can also incorporate other priorities important to your organization and customers.
- Collaborate with others to leverage the power of your purchasing dollars. Cooperative purchasing of materials for your office or properties may significantly reduce costs.<sup>vi</sup>

#### **What are the options for carpet reuse? Can I buy products with recycled content?**

Furniture can often be refurbished or recycled. Many products contain recycled content – from the basic steel parts to certain plastics, fabrics, fillings, desk, and workstation surfaces. These items utilize composites derived from paper waste, plastics waste, wood waste, and other materials.

Carpet tiles can be both re-used and recycled. Used carpet tiles are identified at sorting facilities, and if the product is in good enough condition to clean and repackage, it may be sold inexpensively to non-profits. If carpet cannot be re-used, it is incorporated as recycled content into new carpet tile products. Many locally-based and national companies refurbish and rebuild office furnishings as well as carpets and floorings. Please see the vendor listing below for more details.

## What should companies look for in a carpet vendor to help them with a U.S. Green Building Council LEED- Commercial Interiors certified project?

The LEED system is fairly straightforward for carpet and hard surfaces (flooring in general). Points are awarded for the following: if product meets the indoor air quality specifications, has recycled content (preferably 10% post consumer and/or 20% pre consumer), contains 2.5% rapidly renewable resources, is made regionally, and if the facility has a permanent entry way system. That said, there are some environmentally sound practices and criteria that LEED does not necessarily address, so don't be afraid to consult other information sources, such as those listed below, to ensure your carpet purchase meets environmental criteria most important to you and your customers.

## Which 'environmental certifications' should I look for and how do I use them to evaluate products?

Environmental certifications should be based on independent 'third-party' evaluations, using criteria that are fully disclosed, and in keeping with ISO international standards. Good examples, which apply to carpet and many other products are:

- Green Seal ([www.greenseal.org](http://www.greenseal.org))
- Energy Star ([www.energystar.gov](http://www.energystar.gov))
- EPA Design for the Environment ([www.epa.gov/dfc](http://www.epa.gov/dfc))
- Scientific Certification Systems ([www.scscertified.com](http://www.scscertified.com))
- EcoLogo ([www.ecologo.org](http://www.ecologo.org))
- Greenguard ([www.greenguard.org](http://www.greenguard.org))
- Cradle to Cradle ([www.c2ccertified.com](http://www.c2ccertified.com))
- Global Organic Textile Standard ([www.global-standard.org](http://www.global-standard.org))
- Biodegradable Products Institute ([www.bpiworld.org](http://www.bpiworld.org))
- FloorScore ([www.rfci.com](http://www.rfci.com))
- Totally Chlorine Free ([www.chlorinefreeproducts.org](http://www.chlorinefreeproducts.org))
- Carpet and Rug Institute's Green Label/Green Label Plus ([www.carpet-rug.org](http://www.carpet-rug.org))
- NSF 140 standards, preferably platinum or gold. ([www.carpet-rug.org/carpet-and-rug-industry/sustainability/sustainable-carpet/](http://www.carpet-rug.org/carpet-and-rug-industry/sustainability/sustainable-carpet/))

### Carpet and Furniture Waste Prevention Strategies

- Consider alternatives to carpet, especially in high traffic areas (sustainable wood, rubber, stone)
- Extend the life of existing carpets (Clean up spills immediately, encourage the use of entrance mats, and take advantage of professional cleaning services)
- Choose "design-for-disassembly"
- Structure bids with vendors that offer recycled content carpet or furniture, "take-back" programs, and "close the loop programs" that make sure that disposed products reach the recycling facility
- Re-use, donate, and recycle used furniture and carpets directly
- Plan for rebuilding/recycling by considering product design. Glued items containing multiple materials are likely to be harder to rebuild or recycle than items which can be snapped apart or unscrewed with standard tools, and are made with fewer "ingredients".
- Be attentive to "post-consumer" recycled content, as distinct from "pre-consumer" or "mill-scrap" in recycled content.
- When purchasing recycled-content carpet, be sure to state explicitly "post-consumer carpet"; otherwise, "post-consumer content" will likely include recycled drink bottles or other materials that were not originally carpet.

## Where can I get more information?

- **Carpet America Recovery Effort**  
[http://www.carpetrecovery.org/pdf/annual\\_report/08\\_CARE-annual-rpt.pdf](http://www.carpetrecovery.org/pdf/annual_report/08_CARE-annual-rpt.pdf)  
<http://www.carpetrecovery.org/ideas.php>
- **NW Carpet Recycling Project (led by Seattle Public Utilities and King County LinkUp)**  
<http://your.kingcounty.gov/solidwaste/linkup/carpet/index.asp>
- **Washington State Department of Ecology Factsheet on Flooring Purchasing**  
<http://www.ecy.wa.gov/beyondwaste/epp/FlooringFactsheet.pdf>
- **EPA Product Stewardship**  
<http://www.epa.gov/epawaste/partnerships/stewardship/index.htm>
- **Carpet and Rug Institute**  
<http://www.carpet-rug.org/carpet-and-rug-industry/downloadable-fact-sheets.cfm>
- **Resource Venture: Recycle It!**  
<http://resourceventure.org/recycler-database>
- **King County: What-Do-I-Do-With-It**  
<http://your.kingcounty.gov/solidwaste/wdidw/>
- **List of BOMA Vendors**  
<http://www.bomaseattle.org/ServiceProviders.html>

## At Your Service

This fact sheet was created in collaboration with Shirli Axelrod of Seattle Public Utilities and Chuck Begg of Legacy Group. Resource Venture is a service of Seattle Public Utilities that provides *free* environmental conservation technical assistance to Seattle businesses. They help companies lower their utility costs, obtain rebates, comply with regulations and receive public recognition, all while protecting the environment.

### Legacy Group

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<sup>i</sup> [www.kingcounty.gov/.../Environmental.../EP\\_Products\\_Carpet.aspx](http://www.kingcounty.gov/.../Environmental.../EP_Products_Carpet.aspx)

<sup>ii</sup> [http://www.carpetrecovery.org/pdf/annual\\_report/08\\_CARE-annual-rpt.pdf](http://www.carpetrecovery.org/pdf/annual_report/08_CARE-annual-rpt.pdf)

<sup>iii</sup> <http://your.kingcounty.gov/solidwaste/linkup/documents/carpet-recycling-strategy.pdf>

<sup>iv</sup> <http://your.kingcounty.gov/solidwaste/linkup/documents/carpet-recycling-strategy.pdf>

<sup>v</sup> <http://www.epa.gov/cleanenergy/energy-resources/calculator.html#results>

<sup>vi</sup> <http://www.recycledproducts.org/>