

Sustainable Office Supply Purchasing Guide

Your effort supports U-M's waste reduction goal:

Reduce landfill waste by 40% by 2025



Sustainable purchasing considers environmental, social, and economic factors by taking into account the life cycle impacts of a product, from raw material extraction through end-of-life management. This approach allows buyers to strategically decrease the negative impact of their purchases. This guide also outlines steps departments can take to extend the life of products.

First, reduce!

- Consolidate all supplies into one area. If there are multiple supply locations you might be spending money on items that will not be used.
- Get a clear understanding of the office supply inventory. With more people working remotely, office supplies left in desks will not be used. Ask everyone to put excess supplies back in the supply room. This will provide a better inventory of available supplies and eliminate unnecessary expenditures.
- Have one person serve as the purchasing leader. That person should be empowered to assess requests for new supplies. They know what others have requested and can minimize duplication.
- Consider the reasons you are using an office supply, find alternatives, and make sure there aren't excess supplies in desks and closets prior to ordering.

Purchase wisely

When considering the sustainability of your purchasing habits, it's important to look at those items that have the largest environmental impacts. Focus your efforts and attention on the items that you purchase most often or spend the most money on. You can typically make a larger impact with these items than those that are rarely purchased. The guidelines below can assist in your purchasing decisions.

Item	Environ. Impact	Best Option	Alternative	Life Cycle
Binders	Worn plastic binders are not recyclable. Plastics are generally made from petroleum.	Consider putting the content online. Remove this item from your purchasing list. Print with less paper (front and back) then staple or clip rather than placing the material in binders.	Purchase recycled chipboard binders that can be composted and the metal rings can be recycled.	If the supply exceeds the expected use, set aside excess for the office supply day or offer to staff for personal use. Worn plastic binders must be placed in the landfill.
Flipcharts	Each page of a flipchart is the equivalent of 9 pieces of standard copy paper. A pad of 50 sheets would be a ream of paper.	Use a whiteboard instead of flip charts. Take a picture when you are done to preserve the document.	If flipcharts are required, choose recycled content.	Recycle paper and cardboard backing after use.
Markers (dry erase and permanent)	Many markers contain xylene, a toxic solvent. The plastic is not recyclable.	Purchase refillable dry erase markers.	Choose non-toxic options (xylene-free).	Refillable is best. When the marker has reached the end of life, send with other writing instruments to Recycle Write .

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Glue Stick	Plastic is not recyclable due to size and shape.	Glue sticks often dry up before they have a chance to be used up. Centralize this office item in a central space. Make sure you put it back when you are done!	Choose a glue that is non-toxic and has plastic made from post-consumer recycled material.	These items must be landfilled at the end of life.
Hanging file folder and file folder	The hanging file is made from paper and metal. These should be reused.	Print less paper. Store documents electronically (MBox or Google Drive are popular options)	Purchase hanging file folders or file folders with recycled content.	Good condition: save for the Office Supply Reuse Day . Recycle at end of life.
Paper	Virgin paper is manufactured with water, energy, chemicals and trees.	Reduce the use of paper by going digital for meeting agendas and other handouts. Set your printer to print on both sides. Use a multi-function copier and select the secured print option to eliminate unnecessary printing by requiring users to log in. Reduce font size and shrink margins to get more on the page.	Choose chlorine-free paper with recycled content. There are also papers that are made from sugar cane husks and other tree-less sources. If you want colored paper, choose softer colors to reduce dyes required in manufacturing.	Recycle all paper. Unused paper can be saved for Office Supply Reuse Day .
Paper Clips	Paper clips are not expensive but throwing them away is a waste of steel. Colored paper clips look nice but use plastic over steel, creating more waste.	The ultimate reusable item. Unless you have bent it into a shape and it can't be put back into its original form or it has rusted, these can be reused for a long time.	Using a paper clip 14 times is equal to 14 staples. Put the stapler away and keep a working supply of paper clips. When you are cleaning out your files, you can recover the paper clips for the next use.	These items must be landfilled at the end of life. Metal is recyclable but the paper clips are too small to be sorted properly. Excess supplies in good condition can be saved for Office Supply Reuse Day .
Pens	It is estimated that 4 million pens are thrown away daily in the US alone.	How many pens do people need at their desk? Call in the extra supplies to stock the supply cabinet.	Purchase refillable pens made from post-consumer recycled content.	Send pens that have reached end-of-life to be recycled via Recycle Write .

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Personal printers	Personal printers waste energy (multiple devices), increase waste (multiple toners to accommodate various models) and waste money (toner expense is included in copier lease).	Evaluate your printing needs. Eliminate processes that require producing documents in favor of electronic or virtual options. Eliminate excess printers.	Use a multi-function copier for printing needs. Find copier vendor information from Procurement . Maintain privacy by using the secure print setup. Reduce paper use by setting copiers to 2-sided printing.	U-M electronics and corresponding toners can be sent to Property Disposition .
Rubber Bands	Natural rubber takes roughly 15-20 years to biodegrade. Synthetic takes almost twice that amount. Almost all rubber bands are made from natural rubber.	Choose natural rubber over synthetic rubber. Since rubber bands purchased in bulk will dry out over time, order a smaller supply. Resist the urge to buy more.	Use clips that have a longer life cycle.	These items must be landfilled at the end of life. They are too small to be recycled .
Scissors, Staplers and Tape Dispensers	Over 15 million staplers are sold in the US alone each year. Reducing the manufacturing of these items will reduce greenhouse gas emissions.	The old days of a pair of scissors, a stapler and tape dispenser at every desk are gone. Most people seldom staple documents and even more rarely tape items. Consolidate these items by sharing between workstations or in a work room.	Consider a stapleless stapler. Consider sharpening scissors before sending them to the landfill.	Working scissors, staplers and tape dispensers can be saved for the Office Supply Reuse Day . Broken items can be recycled.
Sticky Notes	These might be little, but many are sold every year. The bright colors are appealing but they require more dyes.	Save money by using the back of discarded paper for scratch paper.	Choose recycled content paper. The recycled content saves trees and comes in softer colors that use less dye	Recycle used sticky notes. If you have unused pads, save them to donate to Office Supply Reuse Day .