



Section 3: Good Practice Guides

Uniforms / Workwear

What is the issue?

The UK consumes two million tonnes of textiles each year and over half of this is clothing.

Textiles can be divided into those materials derived from natural sources – such as cotton and wool – and synthetics, such as polyester.

Typical procurement risks include:

- Cotton – use of pesticides and fertilisers in cotton growing process
- Dyes - hazardous dyes used in the processing of materials
- Labour – poor working conditions, child labour, low wages, excessive working hours
- Packaging – excessive packaging, non recycled or non recyclable
- Transportation – CO₂ emissions from air-freight

Source: Environment Agency

The production of non-organic cotton is an intensive agricultural process, with the use of pesticides and mineral fertilisers affecting soil and water quality and biodiversity, as well as generating greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions. Further GHG emissions accrue at the spinning, dyeing and finishing stages, as well as during transportation and use of the finished product.

Section 3: Good Practice Guides - Uniforms / Workwear

Government Buying Standards

The Government Buying Standards for textiles came into force for central Government departments and their organisations in March 2011. The mandatory standards are quite detailed and cover four key areas:

- Exclusions and controls on the use of potentially harmful and toxic chemicals
- Reducing the environmental impacts of the product during use
- Encouraging greater use of recycled fibres and end of life management
- Ethical standards in production

The GBS can be downloaded at:

<http://sd.defra.gov.uk/advice/public/buying/products/textiles/standards/>

What else can I do?

- Consider purchasing organically produced textiles
- Consider purchasing textiles that contain recycled fibres
- Consider purchasing textiles with a reduced use of environmentally harmful substances in production
- Consider purchasing textiles with lower residues of substances harmful to human health

Suggested wording for inclusion in tender documents***Example award criteria:***

Organically produced cotton or other natural fibres

Bidders must indicate the proportion of cotton or other natural fibres used in the final product by weight deriving from organic production. To be considered as such, the crop at the origin of the fibre must be produced in compliance with Regulation (EC) No 834/2007.

Verification:

The supplier must provide evidence of the origin of the fibres used and the organic nature of their production, such as the EU organic logo or approved national logos for organic production.

Recycled fibres

Bidders must indicate the proportion of the product by weight made of recycled fibres, i.e. fibres originating only from cuttings from textile and clothing manufacturers or from post-consumer waste (textile or otherwise).

Verification:

The supplier must provide evidence of the origin of the recycled fibres used.

Source: GPP product sheet Textiles

Section 3: Good Practice Guides - Uniforms / Workwear

Further information

Clothing was one of the ten pilot “product roadmaps” established by DEFRA. A [Sustainable Clothing Action Plan](#) was developed in 2010.

DEFRA has recently funded a study to investigate how staff uniforms can be procured in the public sector with a greater emphasis on sustainable development. The final report is yet to be published.

Case study 14 – Environment Agency

As part of their continuous supplier development programme, the Environment Agency worked with their corporate clothing supplier to switch their high volume cotton lines (polo shirts and t-shirts) to Fairtrade ‘organic in conversion’ items from January 2009.

Extensive market research was carried out to find a short-list of ‘2nd tier’ suppliers, and one was selected for a three-month trial period by ten members of staff. The results of the trial were favourable. The garments were comfortable to wear and a good fit. They also washed well and kept their colour.

During the course of the trial the supply chain was checked to ensure ethical and sustainable purchasing principles were adhered to, thereby reducing the impacts and risks associated with the purchase.

Key benefits:

- Fairtrade ‘organic in conversion’ cotton is used
- Non-hazardous dyes are used in the processing
- Screen printing inks are used in the process to reduce manufacturing impacts
- Labour is aligned to the Ethical Training Initiative (ETI) base code
- Minimal recyclable packaging is used, reducing the impact on waste
- Items are shipped, not air-freighted, thereby reducing the impact on the environment through lower CO₂ emissions
- Cost neutral
- Full details available on the supply chain

Costs

Previous range:

- T-shirt - £4.95
- Polo shirt - £7.99

Fairtrade (organic in conversion) after negotiation:

- T-shirt - Fairtrade £5.55
- Polo shirt - Fairtrade £7.35

This resulted in a small saving on the polo shirts (due to them being the higher volume items), which was used to offset the increase in costs on T-shirts and realised a small saving overall.

Section 3: Good Practice Guides - Uniforms / Workwear

Case study 15 – St Helens Council

In a recent PQQ for uniform supply, St Helens Council incorporated a number of questions specifically focused on the environmental aspects of the products being procured, including:

“Does your company provide any eco-friendly product range? If yes, please describe the criteria used to determine that a product be classified as eco-friendly. Provide details of your eco-friendly products, such as Fairtrade, Rainforest Alliance, Organic, European Eco-label, Oeko Tex Standard 100 etc.”

“How do you minimise the use of toxic chemicals, bleach, dyes that are harmful to the environment, and exclude banned substances in the manufacture and supply of your clothing (St Helens Council has a list of banned substances available)?”

“Provide details of clothing that you would supply that is made from recycled materials.”

“Would your company recycle old garments and how would you mitigate the security risk of ex-council branded workwear falling into the wrong hands?”

“How would your company minimise the environmental impact of packaging?”

“Provide details of steps your company take to reduce its greenhouse emissions, which are the main cause of climate change.”