

A Primer on Sustainability Policies for Government and Educational Institutions in the United States that Impact Cleaning and Disinfection Programs

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Introduction

Sustainable policies have been increasing in recent years as governments, businesses, and industry trade associations have become focused on the threat of climate change and the impact humans have on the environment. Green policies and purchasing guidelines play a role in environmental stewardship and seek to address challenges around climate change. These policies may be far-reaching and impact every product that enters a facility.

This analysis aims to highlight current sustainability policies within governments, K-12 schools, and institutions of higher education in the United States that impact cleaning and disinfecting practices and products.

Environmentally Preferable Purchasing and Other Sustainability Policies and Regulations

Environmentally Preferable Purchasing (EPP) is one of the most frequently leveraged policies to deliver on sustainability. EPP policies are found in both public and private institutions and prioritize products or services that have a reduced impact on human health and the environment.¹

An established EPP policy typically involves several key features, including:²

- Waste prevention
- Increase in use of products with recycled content
- Energy and water savings
- Use of bio-based products
- Reduction of use of toxic materials
- Pollution prevention

These features apply across the spectrum, from building materials like cement, paint, and carpet to paper products and cleaning supplies. Typically, EPP policies will require the adoption of new practices and products while phasing out energy inefficient items such as electronics and machinery.³

EPP policies are applied to all major procurement decisions and weighed with other quality, service, and life cycle cost analysis. In these policies, preference is given to products that support the outlined sustainability practices, except in cases where an equivalent green product cannot be found or is prohibitively expensive. Governments following EPP policies can reach their sustainability goals through the procurement of more efficient and greener products.

Identification of Sustainability and EPP Policies in this Analysis

We searched for state and city government entities and universities with green or environmental preferable purchasing policies. We limited the search to government sites and used keywords* to identify policies across all 50 U.S. states. Relevant results included executive orders, legislative statutes, administrative orders, EPP policies, and procurement standards.

It is possible that we have unintentionally missed active policies if they did not appear in our search. This analysis was conducted in March 2022, any new policies enacted after this date have not been included. Additionally, we did not explore sustainability programs of privately-owned institutions, but many may follow the established EPP guidance enacted by their state governments.

76% of U.S. State Governments Have an Environmentally Preferable Purchasing Policy

Within the United States, we identified 38 state governments (76%) with an established EPP policy ranging from mandatory to recommended (see Figure 1). 27 states including Arizona, Minnesota, New Jersey, and Texas have mandatory policies. These mandatory policies required a green cleaning policy; use only environmentally sensitive products; and use products that meet third-party certification. Other states (11) have EPP policies with limited requirements such as preferences on recyclables, energy efficient items, reduced packaging or had policies that only applied in specific settings (such as school districts). 6 states without mandated EPP policies strongly recommend establishing one voluntarily (Idaho, North Carolina, Tennessee, Utah, Virginia, Wisconsin). In these states, recommendations include adopting environmentally preferred purchasing, reducing hazardous materials, and implementing practices to improve air and environmental quality. The remaining 6 states provide no guidance on sustainable purchasing (Alabama, Georgia, Indiana, Kansas, New Hampshire, and Wyoming).

Figure 1. Degree to which EPP Policies Apply by State

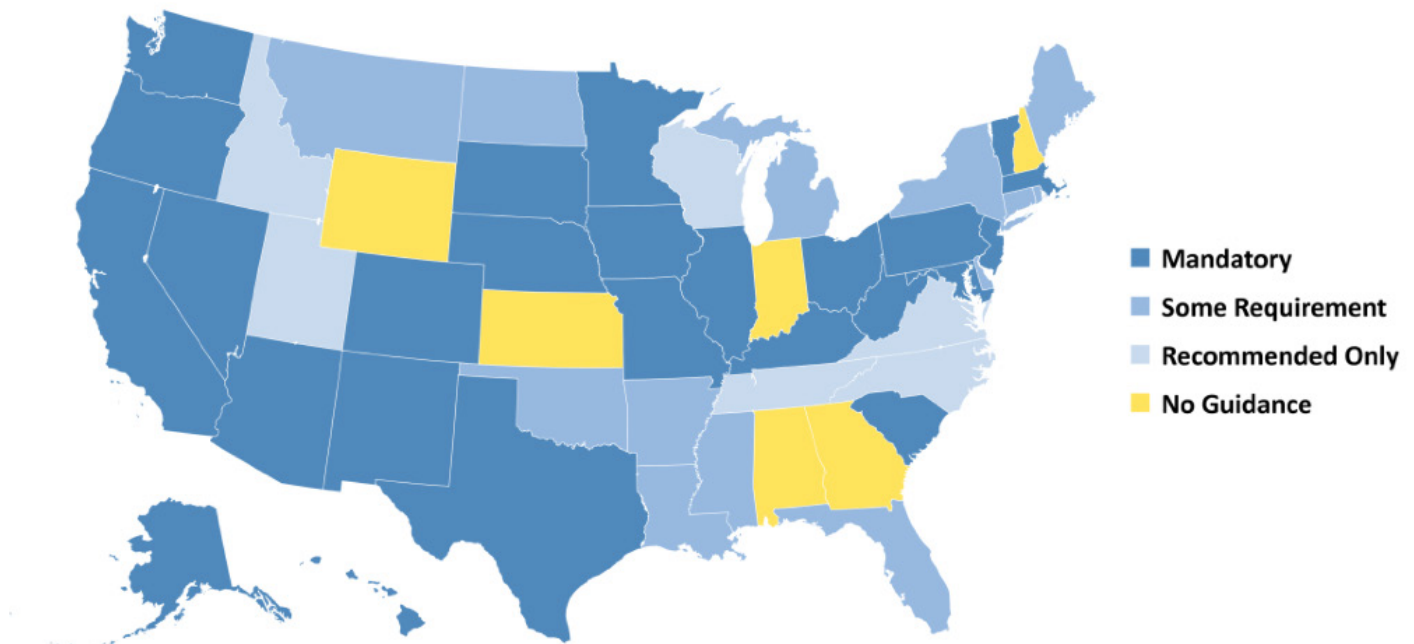


Table 1. State Sustainability and EPP Policies

States with Environmentally Preferable Purchasing (EPP) Policies	Count (%)
Total number of states with EPP policies	38 (76%)
Where state EPP policies apply:	
State Government Buildings	27 (71%)
K-12 Schools	15 (39.5%)
City Government Buildings	9 (23.7%)
Institutions of Higher Education	3 (7.9%)
States with EPP policies that require third-party certified cleaners and disinfectants	22 (53.7%)
Specifically mentioned 3rd party certifications:	
Green Seal ⁴	5 (22.7%)
ECOLOGO ⁵	2 (9.1%)
EPA Safer Choice and Design for the Environment ⁶	3 (13.6%)
States without mandatory EPP policies that recommend voluntary adoption of EPP policies	6 (50%)

Sustainability Covers a Large Footprint in Government Buildings

Regulations for state and city government buildings made up a large portion of the established EPP policies. Of the 38 states with EPP policies, 27 (71%) apply to state specific buildings while 9 (23.7%) addressed city buildings. Cleaning product procurement guidance varied across states with EPP policies (see Table 1). States such as Iowa, West Virginia, and Minnesota require a green cleaning policy and that all cleaning products have third-party certification.^{7,8,9} Arizona and Hawaii require that government buildings conform to LEED certification standard. States with more lenient guidance like Michigan, Delaware, and Virginia recommend environmentally preferred purchasing and third-party certified products, however this is not mandated.

States such as Hawaii, Kentucky, Massachusetts, South Dakota, and Vermont have EPP guidance for green cleaning and disinfecting policies in government buildings which includes the specified use of products that are third-party certified, have a high percentage of post-consumer recycled content, are bio-based, are less hazardous or contain minimal VOCs, and are fragrance-free.

Beyond the city and state level, sustainable guidance and procurement requirements are increasing at the federal government level. Federal buildings, which account for 7.5% of all government buildings, are located in every state and also have mandated EPP policies. These 70 thousand buildings span approximately 1,946 million square feet of government building space throughout the country.¹⁰

Sustainability Guidance in Public K-12 Schools

Regulations in 15 states (39.5%) require EPP in K-12 schools and facilities. With nearly 100,000 public elementary and secondary schools in the U.S., approximately 27,000 (27%) reside in states with an EPP policy including: Arizona, Connecticut, Florida, Hawaii, Illinois, Iowa, Maine, Maryland, Mississippi, Missouri, Montana, Nevada, New York, Tennessee, and Vermont (see Table 1).¹¹

EPP policies in schools also ranged from mandatory to recommended. For example, in Montana schools, green products are recommended but not required, whereas in Connecticut a green policy is required and mandates using products with environmentally preferred third-party certification.^{12,13} Other common guidance in states with an EPP policy for schools includes minimizing hazardous substances (ammonia, chlorine, phosphates and with low or no VOCs), use of third-party certified products, and use of environmentally friendly cleaning supplies.

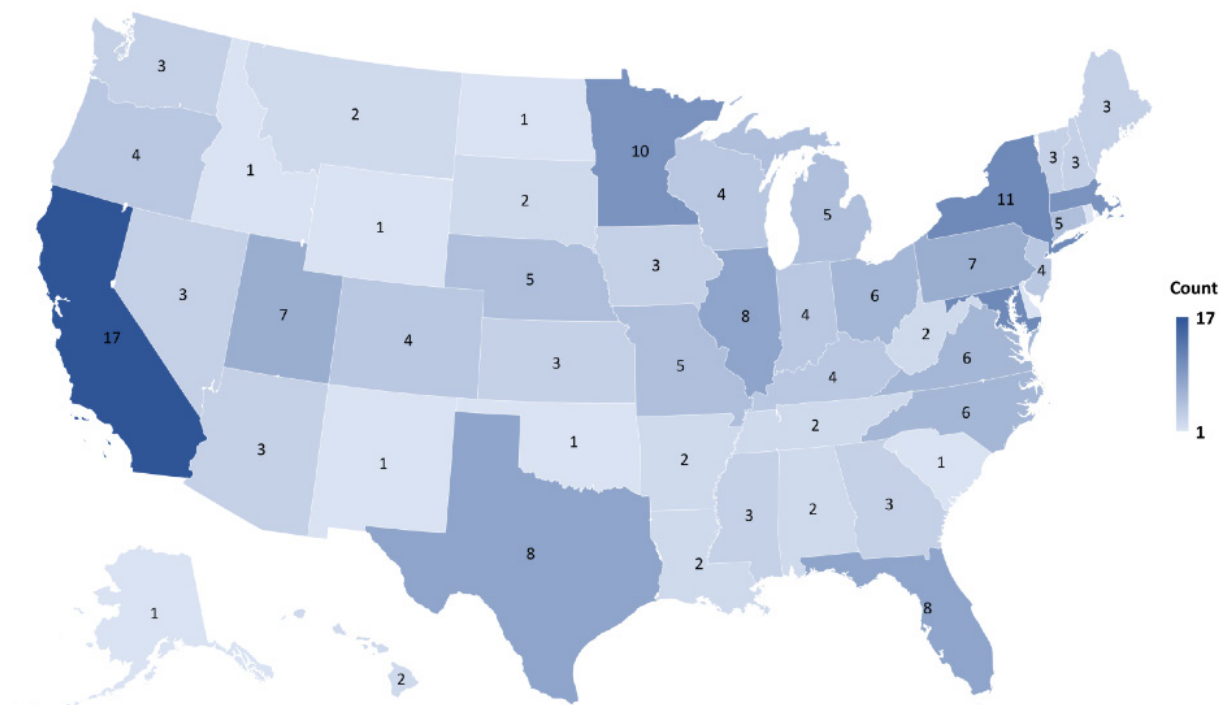
Although no requirements for green cleaning are currently present in Montana, the state still highly recommends using third-party certified products in schools and replacing non-green cleaning supplies with more sustainable solutions as stocks are depleted.¹² While Connecticut policy requires the use of third-party certified cleaning products such as general-purpose cleaners, bathroom cleaners, and glass cleaners, this law does not apply to disinfectants, disinfecting cleaners, sanitizers or other antimicrobial products regulated by the EPA.¹³ Policies in some other states including Delaware and Vermont likewise do not include guidance related to disinfectant cleaners, sanitizers, or any other antimicrobial products.

100% of U.S. States Have Universities or Colleges with Sustainability Programs

Colleges and universities make up a large part of the sustainability movement. We identified 215 public and privately-owned colleges and universities with sustainability programs and EPP policies across all 50 states (see Figure 2). 3 states (Iowa, Mississippi, and North Dakota) have EPP policies that applied to institutions of higher education. These states required that institutions of higher education implement environmentally preferred procurement and use green cleaning products. No third-party certification was specified, but third-party certification would be an easy metric for these universities to choose products that meet the requirement.

Like state guidance, sustainable policies varied across universities as well. At Texas State University, green purchasing is not a requirement however efforts are being made to lessen their environmental footprint and incorporate green certified cleaners and promote their use in other departments beyond custodial.¹⁴ By contrast, the University of Washington mandates the use of cleaning products with third-party certifications and that have low VOC's and high proportions of post-consumer recycled content.¹⁵ The University of Arizona is similar and has a green purchasing policy mandating that cleaners be biodegradable, third-party certified, and citrus-based when their use will not compromise quality of service.¹⁶ No guidance on disinfectants and sanitizers was mentioned.

Figure 2. Institutions of Higher Education with Sustainability Programs



Third-Party Certifications for Cleaning and Disinfecting Products

Of the 38 states with a mandated EPP policy for governments and K-12 schools, 22 (53.7%) required procurement of a third-party-certified cleaner and disinfectant. Key third-party certifications that were highlighted in EPP policy findings included Green Seal, ECOLOGO, Safer Choice, and DfE (see Table 1). Outside of those states requiring third-party certifications an additional 5 states mentioned and recommended procuring third-party-certified products.

Many states that require third-party-certified products may not specifically mention DfE or Safer Choice, however, these products still likely meet the requirements of the EPP policy because these certifications share many of the same features as Green Seal and EcoLogo. Likewise, some states with an EPP policy do not mandate third-party certified cleaning products but can still use these products to help the facilities reach their environmental goals. This is true for states like Illinois and Florida who are still required to have a green cleaning policy and use environmentally preferred cleaners. Other states have criteria that products have a reduced environmental impact, like lower VOCs or toxicity, which a third-party certified product would achieve.

Conclusion

Government mandated EPP policies impact most U.S. states, and nearly half of these require use of third-party cleaners or disinfectants. While legally these policies only apply to government buildings, many of these policies stated their hope that businesses in their state would follow their example. Our analysis was limited to government policies, but we may assume that some proportion of businesses within these states will follow suit.

Momentum in states appears to be growing as well. Only 4 states have EPP policies dated before 2008. Nearly 90% of sustainability policies have been enacted or updated in the last 15 years. In addition to state and government policies, sustainability policies are on the rise in the private sector, with many large companies leading the way to reduce or eliminate their emissions.¹⁷ We expect to see an increase in the number and breadth of sustainability policies in the coming years.

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*Search keywords: sustainability, green, environmentally preferable purchasing (EPP), environmentally preferred products, cleaning products, cleaners, and janitorial

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