



# **Sustainable Purchasing Survey**

A survey of information, training, and collaboration needs and priorities of sustainable purchasers in Greater Vancouver

November 2006

# Sustainability Purchasing Survey

## Executive Summary

The Fraser Basin Council received funding in the fall of 2005 to launch a “Sustainability Purchasing Network” to help organizations improve their sustainable purchasing practices and advance sustainability in BC. To develop a portfolio of relevant and effective products and services, including training, information and resources, dialogues, and collaborative projects, the Network undertook a survey of current and potential participants in the Network. This survey was distributed to 173 organizations (businesses, governments, non-profits, and others), primarily in the Greater Vancouver area, to determine their key training and information resource needs and the degree and nature of their interest in peer dialogues and collaborative initiatives. Information gleaned from survey participants will be used in the design of programs and services that meet the needs of sustainability purchasers while helping them contribute to a sustainable economy.

The survey was distributed February 7, 2006, and generated a response rate of 39%, with 68 organizations completing the survey.

Survey respondents were primarily businesses, with nearly one-quarter non-profits; 13% were from government, and the remaining a balance of labour, public institutions, and co-operatives. There was a balanced representation of micro (25 or fewer employees), small (26-250 employees), medium (251-500 employees), and large (over 500 employees) companies. Respondents were primarily located in Vancouver, with few considering themselves to be advanced sustainability practitioners. Most see themselves as entry-level or having a mix of early and advanced programming. Seven reported they had no efforts underway to develop sustainability programs.

Respondents' top service priorities include a web site to provide access to information and resources on sustainable purchasing, and a business case tool to educate senior executives as to the financial, social, and environmental benefits of sustainable purchasing. They are also interested in participating in dialogues open to a mix of entry, intermediate, and advanced practitioners, primarily to learn of best practices. There is mixed interest in electronic and face-to-face dialogues. As well, they express an interest in participating in collaborative projects, especially those that support the growth of the social and environmental enterprise economy. Product fairs and buying clubs rank the highest for collaborations between purchasers and suppliers and between purchasers respectively, though they expressed a wide range of interests in collaborative projects.

So, too, are they interested in training, particularly off-site training, targeted primarily at purchasing managers and buyers. Although they have diverse needs for information and training, many indicated a clear preference for information and training on screening programs and methods. Measuring, evaluating, and how-to tools and training were deemed worthwhile, along with guidance in sustainability specifications development.

Respondents seek sustainability information in the following product and service areas:

- electronic equipment;
- office products, supplies, and furniture;
- paper;

- waste management services;
- cleaning supplies and custodial services; and
- fleets, fuels, and vehicles.

## Acknowledgements

The survey was conducted by Coro Strandberg of the Sustainability Purchasing Network.

The Sustainability Purchasing Network Management Team would like to acknowledge the efforts of the Network Steering Committee (Appendix A), who provided advice on the development of the survey, and to all the respondents who took the time to give us input on their needs and interests regarding their workplace and sustainability practices. Thanks also are due to McAllister Opinion Research for their assistance with technical aspects of the research. Carol Boutin, Manager, Marketing Communications and CSR, The Ethical Funds Company, volunteered her time to make the document print-ready. Their collective support and encouragement has made this effort entirely worthwhile.

## Sustainability Purchasing Network Funders



## Sustainability Purchasing Network Secretariat



# Sustainable Purchasing Survey

## 1.0 Background

The Fraser Basin Council received funding in the fall of 2005 to launch a “Sustainability Purchasing Network” (SPN), to help organizations improve their sustainable purchasing practices and advance sustainability in BC. To develop a portfolio of relevant and effective products and services, including training, information and resources, dialogues, and collaborative projects, the Network undertook a survey of current and potential participants in the Network. The survey was distributed to 173 organizations, primarily in the Lower Mainland, to determine their key interests and priorities. The following is a summary of the results and implications of the study.

### 1.1 Purpose of the Survey

The purpose of the study was to determine key training and information resource needs, and the degree and nature of interest in peer dialogues and collaborative initiatives, in order to design relevant and effective products and services for sustainability purchasers. Information gleaned from survey participants will be used in the design of programs and services that meet the needs of sustainability purchasers while helping them contribute to a sustainable economy.

### 1.2 Methodology

A sample of large and small businesses, governments and non-profit, co-operative, and labour organizations believed to have an interest in sustainability and/or sustainability purchasing were identified as potential beneficiaries of the Network and survey candidates. The sample was compiled from the following lists:

- Sustainability Purchasing Network database
- Social Purchasing Portal participants
- GVRD 2005 Sustainable Business Forum list of participants
- BC Municipal Purchasing Officers database
- Selected contacts provided by the Purchasing Management Association of Canada (PMAC)

The database was compiled during a three-week period in January, 2006 and limited to the number of organizations (173) that could be identified during this time. Where possible the survey was sent to the head of purchasing (including office manager or administrator) or the senior sustainability manager. Where these contacts were unavailable, the survey was sent to the head of the organization (e.g., Executive Director, CEO). The sample is a subset of a population of sustainability-minded organizations located in, or with operations in the Lower Mainland of BC. The size of the entire existing population of these organizations is unknown. The sample represents those that are publicly known to have some interest in sustainability, specifically with respect to sustainability purchasing. “Interest” was assessed a number of ways: through prior knowledge of the organizations and/or their purchasing managers, through an organization’s expressed interest in sustainability as demonstrated by attendance at sustainability workshops, or through the larger organization (e.g., municipal governments) being

known to have an interest in sustainability through its policies or programs. Additionally, efforts were made to ensure the sample included a cross-section of large and small business, non-profit, academic, and labour organizations, and all levels of government. The search for organizations was extensive but not exhaustive. The sample is not deemed representative of sustainability-minded organizations, but directional and illustrative of their key sustainability purchasing interests.

The Sustainability Purchasing Steering Committee (a 13-member advisory committee of purchasers, suppliers, and sustainability organizations) provided comments on the survey design, as did three organizations involved in the pre-test. The survey was conducted online, with Survey Monkey as the survey tool.

The survey was distributed February 7, 2006 with a response cut-off date of February 28, 2006. 173 surveys were sent out, 68 replied, with a response rate of 39.3%. The margin of error for a random sample of this size would be plus or minus 11.8, 19 times out of 20. As the total universe of organizations from which our sample is relatively small (i.e. limited to organizations that would have an interest in sustainability), the margin of error is thus reduced by a finite population correction factor. A finite population correction factor will reduce the margin of error for a given sample size, and generally applies to a population of less than 10,000.

The Network defines Sustainability Purchasing as: “a management process used to acquire goods and services (“products”) in a way that gives preference to suppliers that generate positive social and environmental outcomes, and that integrates sustainability considerations into product selection so that impacts on society and the environment are minimized throughout the full life cycle of the product. Sustainability purchasing entails looking at what products are made of, where they have come from, who has made them, how they will be ultimately disposed – even considering whether the purchase needs to be made at all.

The following section provides an overview of the Survey Results. Appendix A includes a list of the SPN Steering Committee members and the SPN Project Management Team.

## 2.0 Survey Results

### 1. Information and Training Priorities

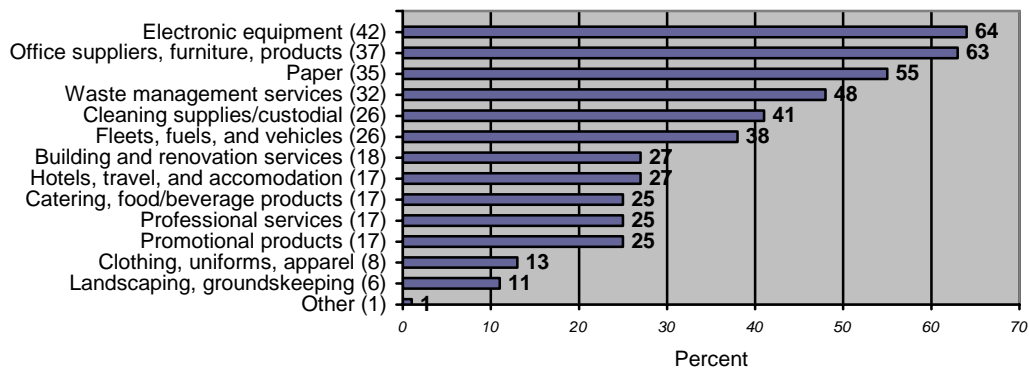
#### 1.1 Priority information and training needs for sustainable purchasing processes

|   | %    | No. |
|---|------|-----|
| Measuring sustainability purchasing impacts   | 62.7 | 42  |
| Sustainability specifications for products and services   | 61.2 | 41  |
| Evaluation processes/protocols/criteria   | 49.3 | 33  |
| How to introduce sustainable purchasing to my organization                                      | 47.8 | 32  |
| How to write a sustainable purchasing policy  | 46.3 | 31  |
| Certification/labeling programs and processes   | 37.3 | 25  |
| Local purchasing opportunities  | 35.8 | 24  |
| Total cost of ownership tools   | 32.8 | 22  |
| Working with suppliers to improve their social and environmental performance                    | 28.4 | 19  |
| Studying a sustainability purchasing business case  | 25.4 | 17  |
| Program monitoring  | 19.4 | 13  |
| Opportunities for increasing sustainability innovation in the supply chain                      | 19.4 | 13  |
| Program reporting frameworks  | 17.9 | 12  |
| Aboriginal purchasing opportunities   | 11.9 | 8   |
| Advocacy approaches to increasing supply of sustainable products and services (campaigns, etc.) | 10.4 | 7   |
| Human rights, sweatshop labour, and ILO issues  | 7.5  | 5   |

Other:

- Sample RFPs, contract language, etc.
- Assessing the value of a sustainable purchasing program beyond the cost of products

#### 1.2 Priority information and training needs for product and service sectors



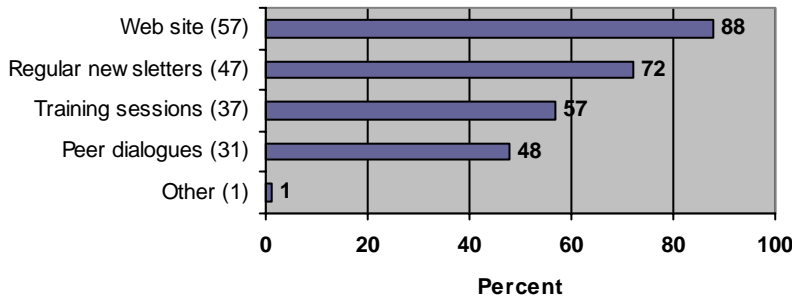
Other:

- Products for resale

1.3 Priority information and training needs for supplier engagement

|  | %    | No. |
|--|------|-----|
| Screening programs and methods   | 75.8 | 50  |
| Collaborative programs and approaches between purchasers and suppliers | 53.0 | 35  |
| Programs to encourage improved supplier sustainability performance     | 53.0 | 35  |
| Certification programs and approaches                                  | 43.9 | 29  |
| Third party verification organizations                                 | 25.8 | 17  |
| Not interested in learning more about supplier engagement              | 4.5  | 3   |

1.4 Access to information and resources



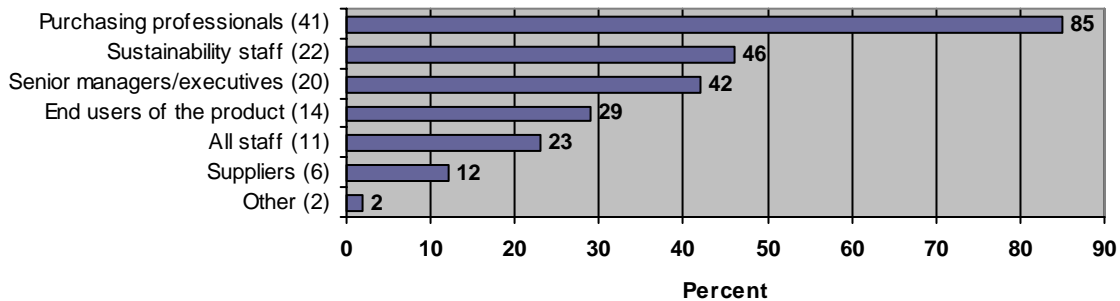
Other:

- On-site reviews and recommendations

1.5 Interest in training

|                            | %    | No. |
|----------------------------|------|-----|
| Interested in training     | 74.6 | 47  |
| Not interested in training | 25.4 | 16  |

1.6 Target group for training



Other:

- Designers
- Sales teams to better understand who is the right type of customer to approach regarding sustainable purchasing

## 2. Business Case for Sustainable Purchasing

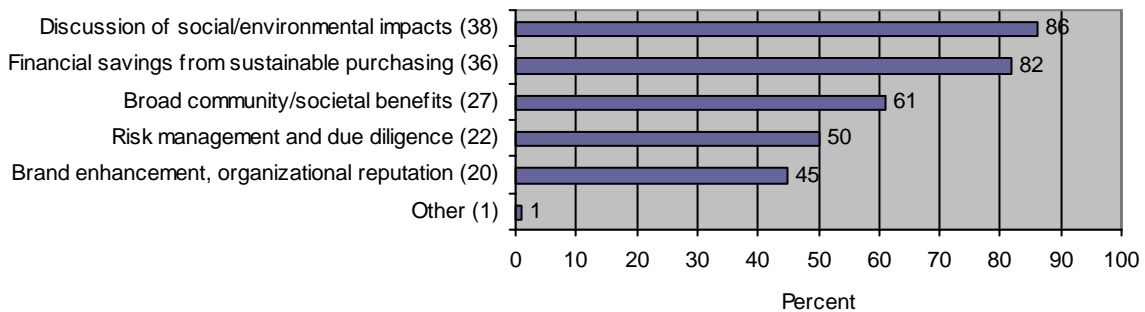
### 2.1 Interest in a business case tool

|     | %    | No. |
|-----|------|-----|
| Yes | 91.7 | 44  |
| No  | 8.3  | 4   |

### 2.2 Primary audience for business case

|                                    | %    | No. |
|------------------------------------|------|-----|
| Executive and senior management    | 65.9 | 29  |
| Internal departments and end-users | 50.0 | 22  |
| Own information                    | 38.6 | 17  |
| Board of directors                 | 25.0 | 18  |
| Finance department                 | 22.7 | 10  |
| External stakeholders              | 18.2 | 8   |

### 2.3 Most important business case elements



Other:

- Total Cost of Ownership

### 3. Dialogue and Shared Learning

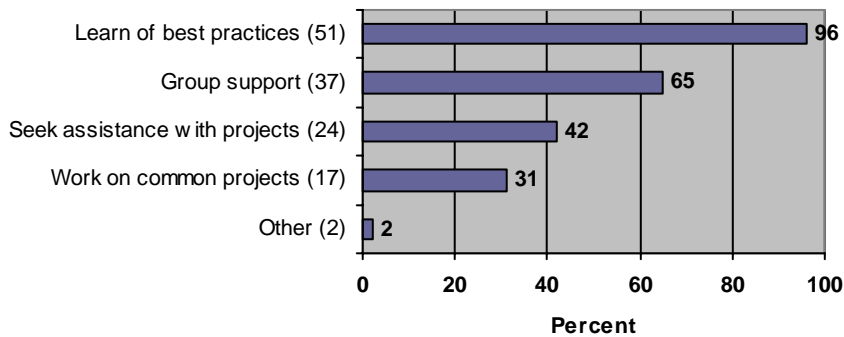
#### 3.1 Interest in dialogue program

|     | %    | No. |
|-----|------|-----|
| Yes | 87.5 | 56  |
| No  | 12.5 | 8   |

Reasons why not:

- Lack of time/organization too small (5 mentions)
- Too early in process
- Think other methods (e.g., training) are a better option

#### 3.2 Benefits of dialogue



Other:

- Troubleshooting tips
- Would prefer to hear from organizations that are doing this now, why they did it, and what impact it had on their organization and their vendors

#### 3.3 Target group for dialogue

|   | %    | No. |
|---|------|-----|
| A mix of peers only, all levels, general audience, specific sectors | 56.6 | 30  |
| All levels  | 43.4 | 23  |
| Specific sectors  | 22.6 | 12  |
| Peers only  | 11.3 | 6   |
| General interest audience   | 11.3 | 6   |

3.4 Preferred delivery method

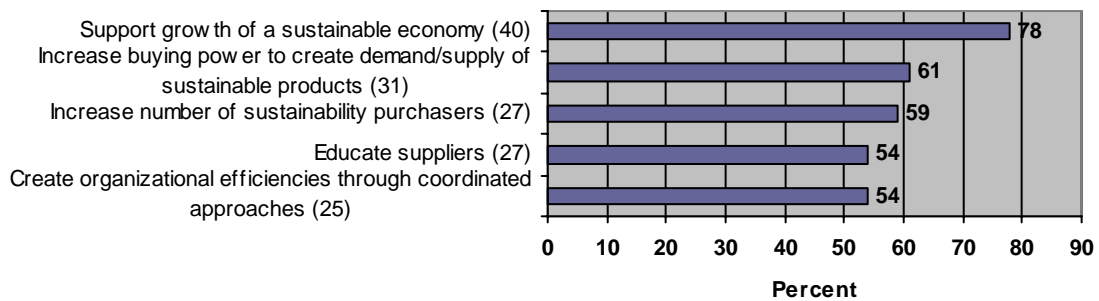
|               | %    | No. |
|---------------|------|-----|
| Electronic    | 33.9 | 19  |
| No preference | 33.9 | 19  |
| Face to face  | 32.1 | 18  |

4. Collaborative Projects

4.1 Interest in participating in collaborative projects

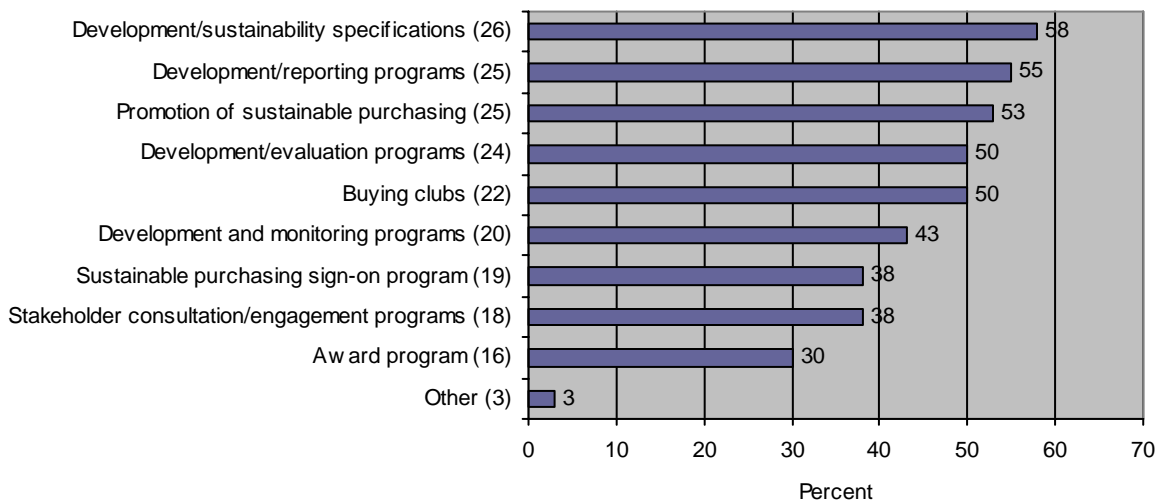
|     | %    | No. |
|-----|------|-----|
| Yes | 77.8 | 49  |
| No  | 22.2 | 14  |

4.2 Collaborative goals of most interest



4.3 Collaborative projects between purchasers of greatest interest

Other:



- We are particularly interested in promoting FSC certified wood and paper products.

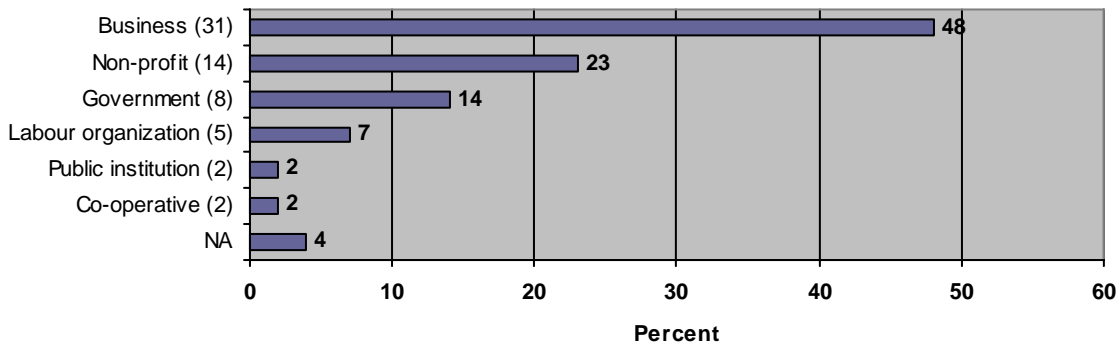
4.4 Collaborative projects between purchasers and suppliers of greatest interest



## 5. Demographics

### 5.1 Type of organization

### 5.2 Type of product or service



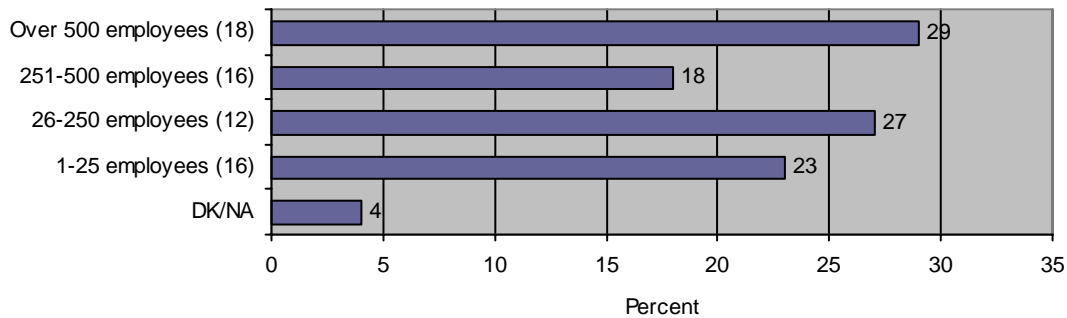
|  | %    | No. |
|--|------|-----|
| Non-profit, labour, arts                         | 23.8 | 15  |
| Retail trade                                     | 15.9 | 10  |
| Finance, insurance, real estate, rental, leasing | 15.9 | 10  |
| Professional, scientific, technical              | 14.3 | 9   |
| Education  | 9.5  | 6   |
| Public administration                            | 7.9  | 5   |
| Information                                      | 7.9  | 5   |
| Transportation and warehousing                   | 6.3  | 4   |
| Manufacturing                                    | 6.3  | 4   |
| Accommodation and food services                  | 4.8  | 3   |
| Wholesale trade                                  | 4.8  | 3   |
| Agriculture, forestry, fishing and hunting       | 1.6  | 1   |

Other:

- Federal government purchasing and commodity management
- Social services charity
- Community economic development services, mapping, planning, lending
- Painting

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- Process design, facilitation and information services re: sustainability
- Facility management
- Convention centre
- Advertising
- Health and wellness directory
- Office products distribution
- Commodity distribution
- Advocate for union members
- Water, sewer, parks, housing



### 5.3 Number of employees

### 5.4 Location of organization

|   | %    | No. |
|---|------|-----|
| City of Vancouver                               | 52.4 | 33  |
| Within the Lower Mainland, outside of Vancouver | 27.0 | 17  |
| Outside the Lower Mainland and within BC        | 3.2  | 2   |

#### Other:

- Multiple locations in BC (3)
- BC wide (2)
- Vancouver Island
- Based in BC, national presence
- Toronto
- Ottawa
- Western Canada
- Toronto, Dallas

### 5.5 Members of a purchasing organization

|            | %    | No. |
|------------|------|-----|
| No         | 51.6 | 32  |
| Yes        | 37.1 | 23  |
| Don't know | 11.3 | 7   |

Name of purchasing organization:

- PMAC (13)
- SPP (5)
- Supply Chain and Logistics Canada (3) (SCL is a non-profit organization of business professionals interested in improving their logistics and supply chain management skills through a comprehensive program of education, research and networking opportunities.)
- Institute for Supply Management (3)
- National Institute of Governmental Purchasing, Inc. (3) (NIGP is a national, membership-based non-profit corporation providing support to professionals in the public sector purchasing profession. NIGP provides its members with services including education, professional networking, research and technical assistance.)
- BC Supply Chain Council (2)
- BALLE
- National Association of Educational Buyers (The NAEB is the professional association serving colleges and universities nationwide. Our mission is to advocate the development, exchange and practice of effective and ethical procurement principles and techniques within the higher education and associated communities, through continuing education and networking.)
- American Production and Inventory Control Society (APICS builds operations management excellence in individuals and enterprises through superior education and training, internationally recognized certifications, comprehensive resources, and a worldwide network of accomplished industry professionals.)
- Costco
- Greater Vancouver Municipal Purchasing Group
- Vancouver Regional Co-operative Purchasing Group
- Paper buying club

*5.6 Status of sustainable purchasing policy or program*

|                     | %    | No. |
|---------------------|------|-----|
| Mixed levels        | 32.3 | 20  |
| Entry level         | 29.0 | 18  |
| Intermediate level  | 14.5 | 9   |
| No efforts underway | 11.3 | 7   |
| Advanced level      | 4.8  | 3   |

Other:

- Don't know. Our organization has expressed an interest in this, but I think we have not yet started.
- We assist others
- We are a small company and no written purchasing policy in place. We just do what we can when we can.
- We have rigorous policies for some products but not others
- Most of our sustainability efforts surround environmental recycling of electronic components and packaging materials

*5.7 Used a resource to help with sustainable purchasing over past year*

|     | %    | No. |
|-----|------|-----|
| No  | 51.7 | 25  |
| Yes | 48.3 | 29  |

Resource:

- Social Purchasing Portal (3)
- GVRD (3) (Smart steps, web site)
- Consultants (3)
- CCSR (2)
- ISM
- Greenbiz
- Green guide
- GoGreen
- Green Meetings Industry Council
- City of Richmond
- PMAC
- Manitoba Procurement Services
- CERES
- World Resources Institute
- Forest Stewardship Council
- Markets Initiative
- Steelcase (furniture and furniture systems company: [www.steelcase.com](http://www.steelcase.com))
- Jacques Whitford
- Green Procurement Network ([www.publicservice.gc.ca/partners/green](http://www.publicservice.gc.ca/partners/green))
- ENN Newsletter
- King County EP Bulletins
- TCO website
- Electronics Product Stewardship Canada
- Office of the Greening of Government Operations
- GLOBE 2006



# Appendix A

## Sustainability Purchasing Network Steering Committee

Chairperson:  
Richard Kouwenhoven  
Hemlock Printers Ltd.

Diana Dilworth  
Fraser Basin Council

Tracey Husoy  
Greater Vancouver Regional District

Mark Jeffrey  
Vancity Credit Union

Linda Jellicoe  
Public Works and Government Services, Federal Government

Bari Kellington  
Vancity Credit Union

Sharry Melia  
Bell Canada

Shelly Morrison  
BC Hydro

Vicky Scully  
Business Alliance for Local Living Economies

Robert Thompson  
Mills Basics

Victoria Wakefield  
City of Vancouver

## Sustainability Purchasing Network Project Team

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Tim Reeve

Barbara Everdene

Coro Strandberg

## Sustainability Purchasing Survey Team

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