Sustainability Guidelines: Gifts, Merchandise, and Flowers

Approved by Approved by Group Sustainability, Procurement and Workplace Services



Introduction

COWI is dedicated to integrating Environmental, Social, and Governance (ESG) principles into specific categories of procurement, including gifts, merchandise, and flowers. These requirements ensure that all products and services are procured responsibly, supporting sustainability, ethical sourcing, and positive social and environmental impact.

Within the focus areas are requirements to set standards for our suppliers and potential partnerships, divided into minimum and optimal requirements. The minimum requirements set out foundational standards, while the optimal requirements outline ideal standards for suppliers and/or products leading in sustainability efforts. In addition, compliance with our Code of Conduct for Business Relationships is required including all applicable local, national, and international laws and regulations where the supplier operates, as well as internationally recognised standards.

1. Overall

A material prioritization hierarchy applies, as detailed below. Preference shall be given to materials that are Ecolabel certified, organically produced, and/or recycled. With a base criterion that all materials are free from hazardous chemicals and harmful processing. Moreover, wherever possible, products that are reused or upcycled should be prioritized over those containing new virgin materials without sacrificing quality and functionality.

1. Natural plant fibres (cotton, cellulose derivative, etc.).
2. Fibre from PLA (poly lactic acid).
3. Animal derivative materials (wool, leather, silk, etc.) with documented animal welfare.
4. Products are thoroughly documented and either recycled, refurbished, reused, made from
   eco-friendly materials, or included in a take-back program.
5. Use of synthetic materials, including polyester, should be minimized. Synthetic fibers are acceptable only if free from hazardous chemicals and harmful processing.

Minimum Requirements:

- Products and services are environmentally labeled (e.g., Nordic Swan, EU Ecolabel), organically produced, and/or contain recycled materials.
- Animal welfare certifications such as Global Animal Partnership (GAP) and Animal Welfare by A Greener World (AGW) must be held.
- Products should be durable, designed for long life and repairability.
- Products must not originate from any country that is subject to sanctions or governed by a dictatorship.
- Documentation must confirm compliance with human rights and fair labor with minimum standards across suppliers and subcontractors.



Optimal Requirements:

- Products certified by Blue Angel, GOTS, OEKO-TEX, Better Cotton Initiative, Fairtrade, Responsible Down Standard, or similar certifications.
- Products designed with circularity principles, using repurposed materials, modular components, and verified repairability scores.
- Providers should offer Environmental Product Declarations (EPDs) and product carbon footprints (PCFs).
- Animal welfare compliance ensured via standards like Leather Impact Accelerator or Leather Working Group certificates.
- Transportation to use low carbon footprint modes such as electric/hydrogen vehicles, rail, or sea freight.
- Providers should align with the GLEC Framework and ISO 14083:2023 for greenhouse gas emissions reporting in logistics.
- Discouraged Materials and Practices:
- Leather goods contain arsenic, cadmium, and lead residues.
- Metal items containing nickel also comply with strict limits on arsenic, lead, cadmium, and mercury.
- Substances including arsenic, cadmium, nickel, phthalates, Bisphenol A, polyvinylchloride (PVC) phthalates, halogenated organic compounds, and other chemicals on the EU REACH restricted list.

Packaging Requirements:

- Packaging should be made from recycled, biodegradable materials, and designed to minimize waste.
- Preference for disposables with minimal amounts of plastic, metal, and glass.
- Packaging must feature clear, standardized labeling with material composition and recycling instructions.
- Product packaging is fit for purpose (e.g. sufficient protection packaging for fragile items).

2. Clothing and Textiles

- Must comply with EU Regulation 2024/1157 limiting textile waste exports and ensure social compliance per the Corporate Sustainability Due Diligence Directive.
- Avoid materials from species listed on IUCN Red List or CITES.
- Optimal certifications include GOTS, OEKO-TEX, Fairtrade, Cradle2Cradle (C2C), and Global Recycled Standard (GRS).
- Commitment to Extended Producer Responsibility and “right to repair” principles is encouraged.

3. Food and Beverages

- Compliance with applicable food and beverage safety laws, organic certifications (e.g., Ø-Mærket, KRAV, EU Organic), and full traceability are required.
- Vulnerable or endangered species per IUCN Red List or CITES must not be used.
- Environmental initiatives aligned with EU Biodiversity Strategy 2030 are encouraged.

4. Flowers

- Preference for locally sourced flowers where possible.
- Evidence of integrated pest management, pesticide reduction, and water-efficient cultivation with certifications such as GLOBALG.A.P. or MPS-ABC.
- Organic labeling and certification are optimal.

5. Advertising Items

- Must be free from nickel and meet strict limits on dangerous metals (arsenic, lead, cadmium, mercury).
- Use biodegradable and recyclable materials, including BPA-free, phthalate-free plastics.
- Ink must be water-based and free from aromatic and chlorinated compounds.
- Refillable writing utensils are preferred over single-use items (e.g. refillable pens, pencils).
- Certifications such as FSC and Global Recycled Standard (GRS) are encouraged.

This document is designed as a guiding framework to support COWI’s environmental procurement goals and to enable sustainable partnerships.