A guide to sustainable IT purchasing with TCO Certified
Make an impact with sustainable procurement

While the IT products you purchase can come with social and environmental risks, the decisions you make as a purchaser can also help you drive sustainable development. TCO Certified helps you do it right.

IT products – a risk to humans and the environment

IT products are associated with a wide range of sustainability risks throughout their life cycle. Human rights violations occur in the supply chain. Harmful substances are used both in products and their manufacture. Products can often have a shorter life span because of poor ergonomics, low quality and when they are not able to be repaired or upgraded.

By asking for TCO Certified when procuring IT products, you can provide an incentive for the IT industry to take more responsibility and move in a sustainable direction. Your choices have a direct effect on how industry acts.

TCO Certified makes challenging the IT industry easier

IT products have complex, global supply chains with many subcontractors, and technology development is fast-paced. Therefore, both extensive resources and a high level of expertise are needed to set relevant product criteria that really challenge the IT industry. Even more difficult is verifying that products and factories meet those criteria.

TCO Certified is a complete and comprehensive solution, with criteria that balance environmental and social responsibility, as well as independent verification of compliance throughout the entire life cycle of the product.

Greater impact when many use the same criteria

When many organizations use the same set of criteria, change happens faster. TCO Certified helps purchasers all over the world send a strong, united message to the IT industry. Instead of trying to meet individual requirements that may contradict each other, industry can focus on making continual improvements that matter.
A global sustainability certification for IT products
TCO Certified is the world’s most comprehensive sustainability certification for IT products. It is a complete tool, ready for use, free of charge for the purchasing organization.

Criteria that challenge the IT industry
The criteria in TCO Certified go beyond legislation and industry standards. To keep challenging the industry, we release a new generation of TCO Certified every three years. This allows us to address the most pressing sustainability challenges and stay current with the latest technology developments.

Independent verification of compliance
Compliance with all criteria in TCO Certified is verified by independent verification organizations. Verification is done both before and after the certificate is issued, covering the entire validity period. The process also ensures that corrective actions are implemented in cases of factory non-conformities.

A global sustainability certification
TCO Certified is valid worldwide. Criteria, verification methods and certificate validity are the same, regardless of country or region. The certification is harmonized with existing global standards and regulations where relevant and possible. Some examples are local labor laws, RoHS, Energy Star and key ILO and UN conventions.

Eight product categories
TCO Certified is available for eight product categories: displays, notebooks, tablets, smartphones, desktops, all-in-one PCs, projectors and headsets. Currently, more than 3,500 products from 20 brands are certified. You can find a complete, searchable listing in our Product Finder on tcocertified.com.

Why IT products are a top priority
IT products are connected with many sustainability challenges throughout the life cycle. For many organizations it is also a big budget item, which means that your choices are important to your suppliers. Including IT products in your sustainable procurement plan can make a real difference.
How to get started with sustainable IT purchasing

These tips can help you get started with using TCO Certified as part of your procurement. You can also contact us with your questions at purchasing@tcodevelopment.com.

Step 1 – prepare your organization

Ask yourself some key questions to assess your current situation

1) Does your organization have sustainability goals?
2) Is sustainability included in your current procurement policies?
3) Is IT purchasing integrated in the overall sustainability strategy?
4) Have you discussed your sustainability policies with your IT hardware vendors?

Set your goals

- Integrate IT purchasing as part of a strategy for reaching your sustainability goals. Purchasing more sustainable products can help your organization reduce negative impacts and contribute to larger targets, such as the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).
- Analyze social and environmental risks throughout the product life cycle to determine which product categories to prioritize in sustainable purchasing. Consider also potential benefits, such as energy and cost savings, and reduction of waste.
- Develop policies and plans with measurable goals and targets for reduced environmental and social impact of IT products. These can include increased responsibility in the supply chain to reduce human rights violations, and longer product use, product re-use and takeback to drive circularity.

Engage the right people

- In policy, contracting and follow up phases, involve team members with specialist competence in IT operations, sustainability, finance, and procurement. Agree upon sustainability priorities and how to measure progress.
- Educate management and team members on sustainability risks connected to IT products and how sustainable procurement can help you reduce those risks. Communicate your progress regularly to build company-wide engagement.
- Ensure management level support for both your sustainability goals and purchasing strategy. This is vital for raising the profile of sustainability as a priority and ensuring adequate support as you roll out your plan.

Step 2 – talk to your vendors

Involve suppliers early

- Make use of pre-competitive dialogs and Requests for Information (RFIs) to discuss your intentions with vendors as early as possible. Ask them which product models carry TCO Certified and which models they will need to certify. This helps ensure availability of certified products.
- Explain to your vendors that social and environmental sustainability is a priority aspect of your purchasing program and that IT products are a prioritized category for sustainable purchasing or leasing.

Communicate your sustainable purchasing goals and priorities

- Ask vendors about their short and long term progress in product and supply chain sustainability, including working conditions in manufacturing and reduced environmental impact. Discuss your intentions in areas such as longer product use, e-waste reduction and product re-use.
- Tell your vendors that you intend to specify TCO Certified in your criteria. Most often, an IT brand decides to certify their products as a direct response to purchaser requests. Making your intentions clear helps drive industry progress and ensures availability of certified products.
Step 3 – specify the criteria

State your intentions
- Consider including sustainability in the contract name to clearly state your intentions up front. For example, “procurement of more sustainable notebook computers”.

Specify TCO Certified
- Specify that products included in your IT hardware contract must be “certified in accordance with TCO Certified” during the whole contract period. Include these requirements in the contract clauses and, if necessary, give the vendor a six month qualification period to fulfill the requirement. In this way, you can accept bids from suppliers, even if all specified product models are not yet certified.

Request certificate as proof of compliance
- Proof of compliance is important. Ask your vendor for product certificates verifying that all product models delivered under the contract period are certified in accordance with TCO Certified.

Hold vendors accountable throughout the contract period
- Specify that supplied products must maintain “an active TCO Certified certificate throughout the whole contract period”, particularly if the manufacturer updates the product model during that time. The certificate is valid for two years, with the option to extend in one year periods. Your vendor should supply updated certificates as continued proof of compliance.
- Include a contract severance clause or other consequences in case a vendor does not provide valid certificates as proof of product compliance that cover the life of the contract.

Step 4 – follow-up when the contract is signed

Buy from your sustainable purchasing contract
- Make sure that your organization continues to use the IT contract that specifies your sustainable purchasing criteria, allowing you to stay consistent with your sustainability principles and better measure your effect.
- Use Product Finder on tcocertified.com to stay updated on certified models and their validity dates. Ask for certificates whenever new models are delivered.

Follow up compliance with vendors
- Follow up regularly with your vendors to make sure the products they deliver continue to maintain active TCO Certified certificates. This is especially important in case product models are being updated. An active certificate means that the TCO Certified system continues to verify product and factory compliance, saving you time and resources.

Measure your progress
- TCO Certified certificates include the following indicators for each certified model: 1. Product energy use*, 2. Percentage of recycled plastic used and 3. Total product weight. These figures can be used to help you measure progress toward climate and e-waste related goals for example. As all indicator data are independently verified, you can be confident using the figures in your sustainability reporting. *Energy use criteria do not apply for smartphones, tablets or headsets.
Criteria designed for driving sustainable development

Certified products meet comprehensive environmental and social life cycle criteria, designed for driving sustainable development in products and their manufacture.

Criteria overview

Socially responsible manufacturing
- Code of conduct: compliance and corrective actions independently verified
- Responsible mineral sourcing, including conflict minerals and cobalt
- Reduced worker exposure to hazardous chemicals used in manufacturing
- Independently verified management system for anti-corruption and whistleblowing
- Intensified monitoring of progress and corrective actions at high-risk factories
- Criteria cover labor laws, ILO's core conventions and United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child

Environmentally responsible manufacturing
- Reduced impact from manufacturing: management system, energy consumption

User health and safety*
- Electrical safety, limited noise levels, electric and magnetic fields

Product performance*
- Ergonomic design, image quality, adjustability
- Product energy efficiency. Energy Star® or equivalent

Product lifetime extension*
- Product durability: drop and temperature resistance
- Battery life and replaceability
- Availability of replacement parts and service manuals
- Secure data removal
- Standardized connectors

Reduction of hazardous substances
- Reduction or elimination of hazardous substances including heavy metals (beyond RoHS)
- Only flame retardants and plasticizers independently verified as safer are accepted

Material recovery
- Take-back options for discarded products
- All packaging must be recyclable

Sustainability performance indicators*
- Indicators provided on product energy consumption, weight and recycled plastic content help you measure progress toward set sustainability goals

* Criteria are specific to each product category
Compliance of criteria is independently verified

Compliance with all criteria in TCO Certified is verified by independent verifiers that specialize in IT product testing, social responsibility or environmental responsibility.

Before a product is certified

- **Factory/brand compliance**
  Independently verified social audits of factories, and assessment of environmental compliance. Corrective actions are set up in all cases of found non-compliances.

- **Product compliance**
  Product testing to ensure that it meets all criteria in TCO Certified.

Application

After certification

- **Review of brand owner initiatives**
  Annual review with brand owners to discuss their sustainability progress.

- **Closure of factory non-conformities**
  Selected risk factories are monitored to drive closure of corrective actions identified in the social audit reports.

Follow up product testing

To ensure continued compliance, a random sample of products is re-tested each year.

Why is independent verification important?

Because without it, you can never know if products and factories meet the set criteria. Specialist expertise and extensive resources are needed to test products and assess supply chain conditions. For credible results, verifiers must be independent of industry, purchasers and any other interest group.
Contact us!

Sustainable procurement is complex. TCO Certified can help you do it right. If you’re ready to get started, contact our Purchaser Engagement Team at purchasing@tcodevelopment.com for free tips and support.