



How to Pass a Green Purchasing Policy

1. Strategic Analysis

If you are conducting a local campaign, it is helpful to first conduct a strategic analysis of the various municipalities in your region that would be likely to support a Green Purchasing Policy. For instance, Citizens' Environmental Coalition (CEC) selected Buffalo to introduce the first New York municipal toxic-free purchasing policy for a number of strategic reasons.

- Buffalo and the areas that surround it, such as Niagara Falls and the Great Lakes, historically had been adversely impacted by persistent toxic chemicals, such as dioxins and mercury.
- The Buffalo City Council was relatively progressive on environmental issues, and there were a few City Councilmembers who might champion a toxic-free purchasing policy. A similar policy was enacted by the Erie County Department of Environment and Planning.
- CEC had a strong base of support among other community and environmental groups in the area and a strong membership base. CEC could connect the PBT-Free policy to another campaign opposing the siting of a PVC (polyvinyl chloride) fabrication plant on the Lake Erie waterfront in Buffalo.
- Buffalo is the second largest city in New York State. If CEC could get it passed in Buffalo, this would set an example and build momentum to have it passed in other cities.

If you are conducting a local or state campaign, it is also helpful to first assess the political climate and possible allies, and think of ways you can deal with the possible opposition. For more details, see Step 4 on Research.

2. Network and Learn from Allies

You can learn how other groups conducted successful campaigns by contacting them and use their "lessons learned" to effectively map out your campaign strategy plan.

While the Green Purchasing Kit provides sample policies, resources and tips, one of the best ways to find out how to pass a policy is to talk with groups that have done it successfully. You can get group or agency contacts from sample releases and memos in this kit, BE SAFE's Precautionary Policy Clearinghouse (visit www.besafenet.com) or by contacting CHEJ BE SAFE Coordinator, Anne Rabe at annerabe@msn.com or 518-732-4538.

You can email a group leader and set up a phone interview to find out how their policy was developed and passed. You can also ask them for sample fact sheets, alerts and news releases. Networking with experienced groups will provide valuable information as you develop your campaign strategy to pass a policy.

3. Don't Reinvent the Wheel: Review Policies

Reviewing model policies is an important first step when drafting your proposal. Depending on the type of governing body, the policy may be a Town, City or County Resolution or Local Ordinance, or a City Council or State Legislature bill or legislation.

Review policies to find out the various ways you can structure the Green Purchasing Program, including definitions, timetable, priority product categories, environmental purchasing criteria, and priority chemical avoidance lists. Using the sample policies in this Kit, you can cut and paste together the sections that best meet your group's policy goal. If you are unsure about which approach to take, you can contact the agency or group and ask them specific questions on how effective it has been during implementation. Remember that the proposed policy will most likely undergo changes before it is passed and compromises may have to be made as the sponsor and Committee members review it, and try to deal with any opposition. So, craft a policy that is very strong and can withstand some changes.

Using existing policies, you can write a proposed Green Purchasing Policy to bring to a representative for sponsorship. Alternatively, you can gather the best one or two Green Purchasing policies and ask the representative and his or her staff to draft the policy based on these documents. Either way, it is helpful to write an explanatory *Summary Memo* that provides an outline of the policy, explains the environmental and health benefits, addresses any economic impact concerns, describes other similar policies that have been successfully implemented, and lists supporting groups.

4. Research

Research your local or state governing body (Town Board, City Council, County Legislature or State Legislature) and find out the following information. What is the best committee to bring forth the policy and who sits on this committee? Who consistently votes in favor of environmental initiatives? Are there elected officials that have a strong environmental commitment? Elected officials are also called representatives, or depending on the governing body, legislators, council members or town board members. You will need to carefully choose the elected official who will champion your policy and be certain that you have organized support before you approach him or her.

Research the opposition within the governing body and also from surrounding businesses and groups. Who may oppose the proposal based on their past poor environmental record? Are there any businesses or industry trade groups that may oppose the proposal? Try to anticipate what their arguments might be and address them in fact sheets and educational materials on the policy.

5. Reach Out to Groups and Build Support

Early in the campaign, you want to reach out to likely allies and ask for their support. Your goal is to have groups endorse (support) the proposed policy and take action. Groups can show their support by sending legislators a Memo of Support, speaking at a public hearing, attending meetings with representatives, participate in a news conference, and activating their members to call representatives as needed.

It is useful to provide groups with a one page fact sheet that describes the policy proposal and explains why it is beneficial. When you contact groups, ask what the process is for their group to consider endorsing the proposal. They may request that you come to their monthly meeting or to a committee meeting. Groups also may want to have input on the proposal, and this level of involvement is important and beneficial. If there is interest, you could have a meeting with group representatives to discuss any needed changes on the proposal.

Be on the look-out for events and other opportunities with groups who may support your policy. Attend meetings, distribute the fact sheet and ask groups to do a Memo of Support. Sit down with as many people as possible and listen to their opinions on who to approach in the governing body, especially groups that have done advocacy with the council or legislature in the past.

Your goal is to organize substantial support among organizations in the region. When you visit legislators, always have a “team” of group leaders to show diversity and strong local support. Provide the legislators with the group’s individual Memos of Support and a Memo listing all the supporting groups, politicians and community leaders.

Constituents: Elected representatives respond to the concerns of their constituents. Early in the campaign, reach out to constituents—the people who live in the potential sponsor’s district. It is always helpful to invite active and articulate constituents to meetings to show legislators there is strong, local support. Also, once the policy is introduced, ask people to contact their elected official through alerts and outreach calls. You also may need to target calls and letters to the sponsoring representative or a Committee Chair where the policy is pending.

Environmental health groups: Seek out and get on the agenda of environmental health advocacy groups in your area. Local, regional and statewide environmental groups are obvious potential allies. Some others include women’s or children’s health groups and breast cancer groups.

Labor groups: Labor groups, such as union locals, regional Labor Councils, or Coalition on Occupational Safety & Health (COSHs) may support a green purchasing proposal because greener products and technologies will result in less toxic exposures to local or state agency workers. Seek out and get on their agenda and present some examples of how going green results in less toxic exposures, such as phasing out the use of unnecessary toxic pesticides in parks like the City of Seattle.

Community groups: Community groups may be interested in joining your campaign because toxic materials in products contaminate local landfills and incinerators and is an environmental justice issue. In addition, materials like vinyl flooring or toxic cleaners create indoor air quality issues that can trigger asthma. Seek out local community groups and explain how green purchasing results in less toxic solid waste, and a priority emphasis on recycling.

6. Find a Sponsor

Visit the Town Board, City Council or State Legislature and become friendly with the staff. Introduce yourself, your group, and your issue. Ask questions about procedures and processes to pass a policy, including committees and public hearings.

Then, once you've gathered organizational support, developed a policy and supporting materials, and selected your first choice for a sponsor, schedule a meeting with the representative. It is important that you have a "team" of people come to the meeting who will show strong local support, such as up to four health, environmental, community or labor leaders and at least one or two constituents. Make sure you have copies of the policy, Summary Memo and Memos of Support for the representative and his or her staff.

Plan the meeting agenda and select someone to facilitate the meeting. Make sure you develop "talking points" so you and others are prepared to take turns raising all the key points on why this policy is important and beneficial, and describe how it has strong local support. At the end of the meeting, ask the representative to officially sponsor the proposal. The representative may want to review it and respond at a later date. If they say no, thank them and move on to the next potential sponsor.

7. Plan a Campaign Strategy and Timeline

Plan a campaign strategy and timeline so you and your group can figure out work assignments, keep momentum going and effectively follow through on activities.

Once you have found a sponsor, it is important to develop a campaign plan with the sponsor on activities and events that will help to pass the policy. Here are some activities that could be included in the plan.

Hold a News Conference. The sponsor and supportive groups can hold a news conference to announce the introduction of the Green Purchasing Policy. You can feature a few examples of how green purchasing will help make the community greener and safer, such as non-toxic cleaning products or reduced pesticide use.

Hold a Public Hearing. The sponsor could hold a public hearing to educate people about the issue, and get input from constituents, groups and businesses. You can recruit people to speak in support of the policy, including experts such as purchasing consultants or environmental professors, group leaders and constituents. Two weeks before the hearing, contact your speakers and make sure they know the time, location, and date of

the hearing. Talk with each speaker about what they are going to discuss and provide them with fact sheets on the issue.

Meet with Committee members. The policy may have to go through a Committee, such as an Environmental Committee or a Governmental Operations Committee. As soon as you know which committee, start to schedule meetings with the appropriate Committee members to ask for their support before it comes up for a vote. Meeting with members early in the process is extremely helpful as you can address any concerns they may have, and inform them of the benefits and strong public support.

Meet with staff in the Purchasing Department. Ask to meet with the key staff in the local or state Purchasing Department to begin the education process on why green purchasing is important. Be prepared to respond to any technical or implementation concerns they may have. If you don't have an answer to a question, let them know you will research it and get back to them with a response.

Tally up the Votes: You need to work with the sponsor to tally up the votes, before the policy comes up in Committee for a vote, and/or when it comes to the floor for a vote by the full Board, Council or Legislature. Check in with Committee members and other representatives (especially in the majority party) to see where they stand and keep an ongoing tally of how many votes you need to win. Be responsive to real and recurring questions and concerns and bring them the information or experts who can provide the answers.

If you have a key representative who is hostile or neutral, be proactive and have constituents and groups contact them. Prepare rebuttals to any business arguments and find out who has been visiting the representative from the opposing side. If a Committee Chair or key representative is organizing against the policy, you may need to focus on alerting his or her constituents. You could organize a door-to-door canvassing and letter-writing campaign in their district.

Media Strategy: Think about a pre-vote media strategy to help generate public support and alert policymakers. Does an upcoming event or a new environmental or health report provide an opportunity for a press event? Will this awaken opposition or will it have the positive effect of pressuring representatives to vote in your favor? Can you get a meeting with a sympathetic editorial board of your local paper and ask them to do an Editorial in support of the policy? Can supporters write Letters to the Editor urging the public to support the policy?

You will also want to work with the sponsor on a News Release and press event plan if the policy passes. After the vote, groups need to congratulate the elected officials who showed environmental leadership by taking action to "green" the town, city, county or state with the new Green Purchasing Program.

8. Sample Timeline

Here is a suggested timeline to follow for a local Green Purchasing policy. Although this is a three-month layout, the campaign may be longer, especially for a state policy.

Month 1

- **Step 1: Do a strategic analysis.**
- **Step 2: Research policies, your governing body and possible opposition.**
Network with groups that have passed policies.
- **Step 3: Develop a Campaign Strategy Plan and Timeline.**
- **Step 4: Contact groups and request their support.**
- **Step 5: Visit the governing body (Town Board, City Council or State Legislature) and become friendly with the staff.**

Month 2

- **Step 1: Meet with the targeted elected official and ask them to sponsor the policy.**
- **Step 2: Develop a campaign plan with the sponsor.**
- **Step 3: Meet with staff in the Purchasing Department.**
- **Step 4: Keep meeting with groups and request their support.**
- **Step 5. Educate the public and policymakers with a news conference or public hearing.**

Month 3

- **Step 1: Meet with Committee members and other key elected officials.**
- **Step 2: Educate the public and policymakers with a news conference, public meeting, fact sheets, letters to the editor and/or editorial.**
- **Step 3: Develop a pre-vote media strategy.**
- **Step 4: Tally up the votes before the policy comes up for a vote. If needed, develop a plan to address any opposition.**
- **Step 5: Right before the vote, again contact any targeted elected officials.**
- **Step 6: Celebrate the passage of your Green Purchasing Policy! Hold a news conference or issue a news release.**

By Anne Rabe, CHEJ BE SAFE Campaign. October 2008.
Acknowledgements: This memo was based on information gathered from the *Case Study: How Groups Passed the Buffalo PBT-Free Purchasing Policy*, a statewide campaign in New York to pass a State Agency Green Purchasing Executive Order and a draft *PBT Resolution Memo* by Health Care Without Harm and Environmental Health Fund.





Case Study: How Groups Passed the Buffalo PBT-Free Purchasing Policy

"We commend the Buffalo Common Council for passing this initiative as it will reduce the purchase of products in the City that may be asthma triggers. Prescription costs, doctors' fees, lost wages due to time off from work for parents of asthmatic children, and the un-quantifiable cost of school absenteeism add up to a hefty burden for families and society from asthma. By switching to safer products we could be offering a child the priceless gift of easy breathing."
Victoria McLaughlin, West Side Community Asthma Project

In 2004, Buffalo became the first City in New York to pass a **PBT-Free Green Purchasing Policy**, wielding its multi-million dollar purchasing power to drive markets for safer products and build towards a comprehensive statewide toxics policy that addresses persistent bioaccumulative toxic chemicals (PBTs).

PBT pollutants are chemicals that are toxic, persist in the environment and bioaccumulate in food chains and, thus, pose risks to human health and the environment. Health impacts of PBTs include reproductive disorders, cancer, birth defects, declines in wildlife populations, hormone disruption, learning disabilities, and other health problems. PBTs are passed to children in the womb and through breastfeeding, impacting them at the most vulnerable time of their lives.

This case study outlines the key steps taken by a statewide grassroots organization, Citizens' Environmental Coalition (CEC), to pass the PBT-Free Green Purchasing Policy.

1. City of Buffalo Selected After Strategic Analysis

First, CEC conducted a strategic analysis of the various cities and counties that would be likely to support a Green Purchasing Policy. CEC selected Buffalo to introduce the first NY municipal toxic-free purchasing policy for a number of strategic reasons.

- Buffalo and the areas that surround it, such as Niagara Falls and the Great Lakes, historically had been adversely impacted by persistent toxic chemicals, such as dioxins and mercury.
- The Buffalo City Council was relatively progressive on environmental issues, and there were a few City Councilmembers who might champion a toxic-free purchasing policy.

- A similar policy was enacted by the Erie County Department of Environment and Planning.
- CEC had a strong base of support among other community and environmental groups in the area and a strong membership base.
- CEC could connect the PBT-Free policy to another campaign opposing the siting of a PVC (polyvinyl chloride) fabrication plant on the Lake Erie waterfront in Buffalo.
- Buffalo is the second largest city in New York State. If CEC could get it passed in Buffalo, this would set an example and build momentum to have it passed in other cities.

2. Learning from our Allies in Other States

CEC networked with other groups to obtain information and sample policies. They conducted phone interviews with key allies in other states that had successfully introduced similar Green Purchasing Policies, such as in Boston, MA; Seattle, WA; and San Francisco, CA. CEC found out how groups introduced and passed their policies, and what they did to ensure implementation, which was invaluable in developing the Buffalo policy and strategy.

3. Innovative Educational Event Starts the Campaign

To kick-off the campaign, CEC organized a private invitation-only screening of the award-winning documentary *Blue Vinyl* for Buffalo City Councilmembers and their legislative staff. We brought the director of the film, Judith Helfand, to speak at the event. With humor, chutzpah and a piece of vinyl siding firmly in hand, Helfand, a Peabody Award-winning filmmaker, sets out in search of the truth about polyvinyl chloride (PVC), America's most popular plastic. From Long Island to Louisiana to Italy, she unearths the facts about PVC and its negative effects on human health and the environment.

After the film was shown, CEC raised the idea of introducing a PBT-Free Green Purchasing Policy in the City. We discussed how the City could help address some of the problems raised in *Blue Vinyl* by using the City's economic purchasing power to buy safe toxic-free products. At the event, a councilmember expressed interest in introducing a Green Purchasing Policy. We thanked him and asked him to meet with us to start work on a policy.

CEC also held three successful *Blue Vinyl* screenings for the Buffalo community, architects and labor union members and labor groups. This helped us to raise awareness among key constituencies that could help support the proposed policy.

4. Introducing the Policy

CEC reviewed toxic-free purchasing policies from around the country. Taking the best elements of the various policies, we drafted a PBT-Free Green Purchasing Resolution for Buffalo. We then met with the interested Councilmember and asked him to introduce the policy and he agreed. After the Resolution was introduced, it was sent to a Committee for consideration.

5. Building Support and an Effective Coalition

CEC organized a coalition of over 20 local, regional and statewide organizations to support the policy. It included health organizations such as the Learning Disabilities Association of WNY, environmental groups such as the NY Public Interest Research Group, Great Lakes United and Friends of the Buffalo Niagara Rivers, labor groups such as the Coalition for Economic Justice and the Western New York Council on Occupational Safety and Health, and civic organizations such as the League of Women Voters of Buffalo Niagara and Citizen Action.

We circulated an endorsement memo asking organizations to sign on in support of the Buffalo PBT-Free Purchasing Policy. This was an effective way to show strong public support from an alliance of groups in our meetings with city legislators. CEC also asked groups to mail and fax letters of support to key legislators. As needed, we helped groups by drafting the letters for them.

CEC set up meetings with the Buffalo Common Council Committee Chair and every Councilmember that sat on the committee to ask for their support. We distributed packets of information, which included the proposed Resolution, newspaper articles on the problems of persistent toxic chemicals in the Buffalo Niagara Falls region, and a list of over 20 organizations that supported the policy. We also included a memo with examples of products the City was likely purchasing that contained PBT chemicals. These meetings were key activities in our campaign. At their conclusion, we had the support of almost every single Councilmember on the committee.

CEC then set up meetings with all the other Councilmembers on the Buffalo Common Council and informed them of the need for the Resolution and the strong public support.

6. Passing the Policy

Within a month of introduction, a committee public hearing was held. CEC did outreach and made sure key speakers registered to testify in support of the Resolution. We helped some leaders by reviewing or assisting in the development of their testimony. Groups testifying included representatives of the Buffalo Environmental Management Commission, Buffalo Pest Management Board, Sierra Club Niagara Group, St. Joseph University Parish Social Justice Committee, Erie County Department of Environment and Planning, Great Lakes United, and the NY Public Interest Research Group.

After the hearing, the resolution was voted out of committee unanimously. CEC continued to advocate for the Resolution with meetings, letters and phone calls. In a few weeks, the resolution was voted on and unanimously adopted by the Buffalo City Council.

CEC issued a news release announcing that Buffalo was the first city in the state to adopt a PBT-Free Green Purchasing Resolution, and Associated Press and other key media outlets did stories on the victory.

"I am proud to sponsor the PBT-Free Purchasing Resolution which will go a long way in protecting Buffalo residents from toxic chemical exposure," said Councilmember Antoine Thompson, who was the lead sponsor of the policy. "This resolution demonstrates the City's commitment to ensuring a healthy and safe environment for generations to come."

7. Implementing the Policy

CEC knew that it was important to work collaboratively with the city purchasing staff in order to effectively implement the policy. A supportive City Councilmember sponsored a few meetings where we met with the city staff who did purchasing to discuss how the policy could be implemented.

Over the next six months, CEC held regular meetings with the city staff and assisted them by:

- Reviewing proposed contracts, and identifying products the City would likely be purchasing that would lead to persistent toxic pollution;
- Identifying safer products, including how these products compared environmentally and on a cost and performance basis; and
- Compiling and presenting information to purchasers with our recommendations.

The Buffalo policy has helped pave the way for similar efforts around the state. Since its passage, similar policies were enacted in New York City and Hudson, NY, and proposals have been introduced in Long Island, Syracuse, Albany and the NYS Assembly and Senate.

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