

Sustainable Purchasing Guide



Indoor Furniture

Use this Guide When Purchasing

- Chairs and stools
- Desks and workstations
- Tables
- Bookcases and shelving
- Filing and storage cabinets
- Lounge furniture (e.g., couches, side chairs)

Furniture can contain hidden toxic chemicals that can off-gas or leach out over time, posing risks to human health. The Minimum Requirements in this guide focus on reducing exposures to harmful chemicals, among other beneficial attributes.



How to Purchase

Prior to purchasing new furniture, check for surplus furniture available from other departments. Otherwise, check with your central procurement office or administrative or facilities staff to find out if you have any furniture standards (required brand/model) and/or contracts that employees are required to use to purchase furniture. When you are seeking these products in a store or online, check the product details to confirm it meets the Minimum Requirements listed below. If furniture is being specified by hired consultants, such as architects or interior designers, ensure they are referencing these Minimum Requirements as well.

Product Requirements - *specify or seek:*

MINIMUM REQUIREMENTS/ SPECIFICATIONS	LEADERSHIP OPPORTUNITIES
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Product is BIFMA LEVEL 1 certified or higher with Credit 7.4.4: Targeted Chemical Elimination achieved	<p><i>Minimum Requirements plus one or more of the following:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Product is BIFMA LEVEL 2 certified or higher with Credit 7.4.4: Targeted Chemical Elimination achieved• Product is Forest Stewardship Council (FSC) certified (for wood or bamboo)• Product contains post-consumer recycled content• Manufacturer or vendor has an end-of-life take-back and recycling program• If upholstered, fabric has one of the following certifications: Cradle to Cradle, GOTS, GreenScreen, NSF/ANSI 336 (FACTS label), or OEKO-Tex 100

Ecolabels to Look For



WHAT IS BIFMA LEVEL CREDIT 7.4.4?

BIFMA LEVEL is a third-party verified, multi-attribute certification that evaluates furniture across four categories: materials, energy, human health, and social responsibility. Products earn points toward a LEVEL 1, 2, or 3 rating. The higher the rating, the more rigorous the sustainability performance.

BIFMA LEVEL Credit 7.4.4 is an optional credit that requires manufacturers to restrict high-priority toxic chemicals known as the “hazardous handful”: formaldehyde, flame retardants, antimicrobials, PFAS, and PVC (vinyl). This credit aligns with [Healthcare Without Harm’s Healthy Interiors criteria](#) and is also supported by the Center for Environmental Health and Practice Greenhealth.

PRODUCT REGISTRY

Find/verify certified furniture products by using the following online certified product registry:

- [BIFMA LEVEL](#) Product Registry

Note: There is no online certified product directory for FSC products. Instead, look for the FSC ecolabel on the product and/or in product documentation from the manufacturer.

How to Identify BIFMA Level Certified Furniture with Credit 7.4.4

The BIFMA LEVEL product registry makes it easy to identify furniture that meets credit 7.4.4. To find these products, expand the “Sustainability Criteria” filter and select “Targeted Chemical Elimination (7.4.4).” You can further refine your search by category and subcategory of furniture products, LEVEL rating, brand, and more.



- Sustainability Criteria *
 - Targeted Chemical Elimination (7.4.4)
 - Chemicals Assessed
 - Embodied Energy Reduction
 - Extended Product Responsibility
 - Life Cycle Assessment
 - Low Emitting
 - Optimization Global Harmonization Sys Classification
 - Recycled Content

Other Certifications for Furniture

Furniture is a complex purchasing category with many sustainability certifications. While the following certifications support safer chemistry and transparency, they are not currently recommended as minimum requirements due to limited availability of certified products.



[GreenScreen](#) eliminates the “hazardous handful”—formaldehyde, flame retardants, PFAS, antimicrobials, and PVC (vinyl)—but currently there are only certified textiles. However, there may be certified furniture products in the future.



[Cradle to Cradle](#) Certified and Cradle to Cradle Material Health Certificate at the silver level or above addresses the “hazardous handful” to an extent, but is more commonly used for building materials and finishes. Cradle to Cradle Certified evaluates a product across five sustainability categories, while the Material Health Certificate focuses solely on the chemical safety of materials used in the product.



[Declare Red List Free](#) is a label from the International Living Future Institute indicating that a product contains none of the harmful chemicals on the Living Building Challenge Red List. It is primarily a transparency tool, based on disclosed ingredients, but some products do have third-party verification.

Certifications for Fabric for Upholstered Furniture

While BIFMA LEVEL with Credit 7.4.4 ensures safer furniture overall, these fabric certifications provide deeper, specialized guarantees around chemical safety, organic sourcing, circularity, social compliance, and/or material transparency specifically for the textiles used. If you have a choice of fabrics, look for one or more of these certifications, based on your organization's priorities:



[Cradle to Cradle](#) recognizes textiles that are designed for a circular economy, focusing on material health, reuse, renewable energy, water stewardship, and social fairness.



[GOTS](#) ensures textiles are made with certified organic fibers and meet rigorous environmental and social criteria throughout the entire supply chain.



[GreenScreen](#) identifies textiles made with chemicals that have been assessed and benchmarked to avoid the most hazardous substances.



[NSF/ANSI 336 \(FACTS\)](#) evaluates textiles based on a point-based system that covers environmental, health, and social impacts, providing a transparent sustainability scorecard.



[OEKO-TEX 100](#) certifies that every component of a textile product has been tested for harmful substances and is safe for direct human contact.

Benefits

- **Enhances indoor air quality:** Selecting low-emitting furniture reduces exposure to toxic chemicals that can off-gas into indoor environments, improving air quality and occupant health.
- **Reduces exposure to harmful chemicals:** Choosing greener furniture helps minimize contact with substances linked to cancer, hormone disruption, asthma, and other health concerns.
- **Supports green building goals:** Purchasing BIFMA LEVEL certified furniture can help earn points from green building certifications like LEED and WELL.

Related Tips

- **Choose modular, configurable, or easily repairable furniture** to extend product life, support future reconfiguration, and reduce the need for new purchases over time.
- **Consider refurbishing or reupholstering** existing furniture and purchasing remanufactured furniture.

Additional Resources

- Check out the Center for Environmental Health (CEH) toolkit [Kicking Toxic Chemicals Out of Office Furniture](#) for detailed information on health concerns, product recommendations, and practical tools to support safer furniture purchasing.
- Go to the [StopWaste Sustainable Purchasing website](#) for additional implementation resources such as other [Sustainable Purchasing Guides](#), [compliant product lists](#), [contracting resources](#), and other support tools.

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