

March 27, 2015

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Wordcount: 303

## **How Green Is Our County? Grand Jury Issues Report on Purchasing Policy**

Ten years ago the County of Ventura's General Services Agency (GSA), which oversees purchasing for 27 agencies and departments, developed a policy to reduce waste and promote the purchase of recycled products. The new policy spelled out guidelines for purchasing paper—a major yearly expense. During 2014, for example, 600-plus copy machines countywide consumed about 50 million blank sheets of paper. The GSA policy authorized a cost for recycled paper products of 10 percent more than the cost of virgin paper products.

The 2014-2015 Ventura County Grand Jury wanted to assess the effectiveness of this "green" procurement policy, especially in the area of recycled paper products. To be clear, the grand jury supports the goals stated in the policy.

The grand jury investigated by reviewing the county's policies and procedures related to purchasing and use of recycled products; interviewing county employees involved in ordering "green" products and services; examining purchase orders, requests for proposals, and purchasing-activity reports; and accessing purchasing-related county webpages.

Among the grand jury's conclusions:

- The policy is unclear as to whether it describes requirements or simply goals;

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- Complying with the policy has been left up to purchasing agents in the county's separate departments and agencies.
- Any additional costs for using recycled paper are not generally known.

As a result of its investigation, the grand jury made several recommendations. The most important ones are (1) that the green procurement policy be revised to clearly state whether it consists of goals or requirements—and, if requirements, to state who is responsible for enforcing them and monitoring costs; and (2) that the Procurement Department within GSA help the county's agencies and departments develop restricted lists of post-consumer recycled-content products that satisfy the policy's guidelines.

The complete report may be accessed at <http://www.ventura.org/grand-jury>; click on the "Annual Reports" tab and consult "Fiscal Year 2014-2015."

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