

Furniture

When furnishing your office, always follow the five basic steps below:

1. Buy only what you need.
2. Purchase re-used or refurbished furniture if possible. UBC is currently examining options for reinstating furniture reuse on campus. In the meantime, you can contact re.use@ubc.ca to find out if there is any reusable furniture in stock. Craigslist, Kijiji and Freecycle are all popular external sources for used furniture.
3. If no re-used furniture is available, use the criteria below to select the most sustainable furniture available through the UBC Bookstore's [preferred vendors](#).
4. Follow the UBC guidelines for purchasing new office furniture, available [online](#).
5. The UBC Bookstore offers full service solutions for furniture needs.

SUSTAINABLE FURNITURE

Whenever possible, choose products that display a combination of the considerations listed in the left column and avoid products that demonstrate characteristics listed in the right column.

CHOOSE	AVOID
Low or no VOC-emitting products	PVC plastics
Eco-logo, Green Guard, SCS or Cradle to Cradle certified	VOC emitting chemicals like formaldehyde, benzene, acetone, toluene, xylene, 1,3-butadiene
Socially responsible products made using fair labour practices	
High percentage post-consumer recycled materials	Foams containing CFCs and HCFCs
FSC certified wood products	Products containing PBDE (polybrominated diphenyl ethers)
Latex Foam	
Natural fibres and materials	Synthetic fibers
Locally manufactured and Canadian made	Non-certified tropical hardwoods and wood that are not from a sustainability harvested source
Durable, modular and adaptable products	
Blanket wrapped shipping for protection	Unnecessary product packaging
Manufacturers that offer deconstruction, reuse or recycling	Choosing styles of furniture that are easily dated and non-functional
Products containing non-toxic adhesives, paints and coatings	Ordering furniture that needs to be transported long distances

Authentic Logos

When purchasing furniture look for these symbols:



Third party certified products for low-emitting products.



Scientific Certification Systems for third party certification on indoor air quality.



Ecologo certification: third party certification of environmentally-preferable products.



Third party certification that demonstrates Design for Environment, product re-utilization and use of healthy and safe materials.



Photo: Haworth Furniture

Furniture continued

Get informed by reviewing the common terms, standards and certification schemes outlined below.

Choose low or no-VOC emitting products

Volatile Organic Compounds (VOCs) are gasses given off by indoor sources, including paint, carpet and furniture. Think of that new home smell – that’s the smell of VOCs off-gassing. VOCs are carbon based chemicals, including formaldehyde and benzene and can cause health problems including eye, nose and throat irritation, headache, nausea, dizziness, and skin problems. Higher concentrations may cause irritation of the lungs, as well as damage to the liver, kidney, or central nervous system. Some VOCs have been shown to cause cancer in animals and are likely linked to some cancers in humans.

- To minimize your exposure to VOCs and increase indoor air quality at work, purchase low VOC-emitting furnishings or look for GREENGUARD and SCS certifications.

Look for third party, industry independent certifications

- The GREENGUARD Indoor Air Quality [Certification Program](#) certifies low-emitting products. [Scientific Certification Systems \(SCS\)](#) also offers third party certification not only for indoor air quality (IAQ) but for several other categories including furniture, flooring and carpeting, environmentally preferred products and material content.
- The [EcoLogo Program](#) is an internationally recognized certification program founded by the Government of Canada in 1988. EcoLogo certifies a number of furniture products including office tables, bookshelves, desks, chairs and filing cabinets.
- [Cradle to Cradle](#) certifies products that demonstrate re-utilization (eg: the ability for product components to be re-used or reassembled at a later date into a new product) and the use of healthy and safe materials.

Ensure the furniture product uses FSC certified wood

[Forest Stewardship Council](#) (FSC) is an international non-profit organization that sets principles and guidelines for certifying and labeling forest products that are harvested, processed and manufactured in a sustainable fashion. If you purchase products made with wood, look for the FSC logo. If you are unsure if the wood is FSC certified, ask the supplier or manufacturer where the wood was harvested or imported from. Avoid any uncertified tropical hardwood from Southeast Asia, Central or South America and Africa. Greenpeace Australia’s [Good Wood Guide](#) offers consumers an easy to use “Green, Yellow, Red” tool that aims to

help consumers make an informed, environmentally responsible decision when purchasing wood and wood products.

Examine the percentage of post-consumer recycled material

Choose furniture with a high percentage of post-consumer recycled content made with materials, such as metal, plastics, pressboard and fabric, that would have otherwise ended up in the landfill.

Choose natural latex foam

Natural latex foam is non-toxic, anti-microbial and resists mold and dust-mites. Avoid plastic foams that contain CFCs and HCFCs or polyurethane. Imported polyurethane foam may contain toxic chemicals, such as fire retardants. Most Canadian upholstery and bedding companies do not use PBDE, a group of fire retardants linked to reproductive and immunity problems and thyroid damage. PBDEs are persistent in the environment and have been found in women’s breast milk. If ordering a product made outside of Canada, ask if the product contains fire retardants.

Source locally and within Canada

Buying locally manufactured products ensures that dollars are put back into local economies.

“In the furniture industry, ‘normal’ practices have resulted in chemical fire retardants from polyurethane foam contaminating your breast milk, toxic heavy metals from textiles in your blood, and a chemical stew of toxic volatile organic compounds off-gassing into your lungs.”

- CEO Len Laycock of Upholstry Arts
Upholstry Arts specializes in cradle to cradle furniture design, based in Vancouver