



How the EPEAT Ecolabel Helps You Address Social Impacts in the IT Supply Chain

The EPEAT ecolabel empowers purchasers to meet their organizational sustainability goals through their purchasing decisions. Products available through EPEAT include computers, monitors, copiers, mobile phones, televisions, and servers. EPEAT is just one of several sustainable purchasing resources freely available from the Green Electronics Council (GEC).

Why are Social Impacts a Sustainability Concern?

Sustainable products are designed and manufactured in ways that are better for the environment, the people involved in the manufacture, assembly, and end-of-life disposal of those products, and the users of those products.

Workers throughout the IT supply chain, from initial mineral extraction to production, assembly, and ultimately end-of-life processing, have historically been subject to human and labor rights abuses. Integral to electronic products are tantalum, tin, tungsten, and gold, referred to as “conflict minerals” because they are often sourced from mines with abhorrent human rights violations and controlled by militia groups that use the sale of these minerals to fund violent conflict. Conflict-free minerals are those sourced from outside the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) or from mines where human and labor abuses are minimized. The Dodd-Frank Act requires companies to disclose their use of conflict minerals. The technology sector



outperformed all others in reporting on conflict minerals within their supply chains.¹ In January 2021 the EU Conflict Minerals Regulation will apply, targeting minerals originating from all conflict-affected or high risk areas, not just the DRC.

Along with conflict minerals, workers within the IT supply chain face risks ranging from exposure to unsafe chemicals, use of child labor, excessive working hours, and forced labor. There has been global commitment to address these issues, aided by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) Guidelines, that list specific social responsibilities of companies, and by industry associations, such as the Responsible Business Association (RBA); but the problems persist and social is a necessary sustainability impact that the EPEAT ecolabel seeks to address.

How EPEAT-Registered Products Address Social Impacts in the IT Supply Chain

The EPEAT ecolabel has both required and optional criteria. The required criteria ensure that the product is credibly sustainable, and a product must meet every required EPEAT criterion to be considered an “EPEAT-registered” product. Optional criteria are additional criteria that a manufacturer can choose to have their product meet. By choosing to go beyond the required criteria, manufacturers show their commitment to addressing social issues. The more purchasers prefer products that address labor and human rights, the faster we’ll have a world that benefits workers along the entire supply chain.

Products from different EPEAT categories may address social impacts differently because each product category has product-specific criteria. EPEAT criteria address social impacts in the IT supply chain in the Computers and Displays, Mobile Phones, and Servers categories.

¹ <https://www.globenewswire.com/news-release/2019/10/10/1928166/0/en/Global-Lack-of-Reporting-on-Conflict-Minerals-and-Cobalt-Puts-Investors-at-Risk.html> (accessed January 16, 2020)



EPEAT Required Criteria Address Social Impacts in the IT Supply Chain

EPEAT criteria address social impacts throughout the IT supply chain, from extraction to manufacturing to end of life processing. At the extraction phase, EPEAT criteria require transparency in the identification of conflict minerals present in all registered computer, display, server, and mobile phone products. Server criteria require manufacturers to implement accredited occupational health and safety management systems in all of the manufacturer-owned facilities that play a role in the production of EPEAT-registered server products.

Worker health and safety at the end of a product's life can also be subject to risk when they unknowingly come into contact with potentially hazardous substances during product disassembly. EPEAT criteria require the identification of materials and components that need special handling to protect the health and safety of workers in recycling and refurbishment facilities.

Using Optional EPEAT Criteria to Address Social Impacts in the IT Supply Chain

When IT manufacturers choose to meet optional EPEAT criteria for social impacts, purchasers have increased transparency into both the manufacturers' and the suppliers' labor practices and social responsibility. These criteria include those for labor practices, worker health and safety certification and audits for both manufacturers and their suppliers that meet or exceed international labor standards. Additionally, optional criteria support responsible, conflict-free mines in the DRC through manufacturer and supplier contribution to in-region capacity building programs.

Examples of optional EPEAT criteria that address social impacts include:

- Participation in an in-region program that advances responsible sourcing of conflict minerals
- Certification to social responsibility performance standard
- Smelter and refiner participation in Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD)-aligned third party mechanisms



Finding the EPEAT-Registered Products That Address Social Impacts in the IT Supply Chain

To find products designed to address social impacts, purchasers can search the EPEAT Registry at epeat.net. Optional criteria can be found at the bottom of the FILTERS box by clicking on "VIEW ADVANCED SEARCH OPTIONS." Search results will include products that meet all of the selected optional criteria.

Quantifying Your Positive Impact

The Green Electronics Council provides an EPEAT Benefits Calculator that can quantify specific environmental and cost savings associated with the purchase of EPEAT-registered products including energy savings, greenhouse gas emission reductions, non-hazardous solid waste reductions, avoided toxic substances, smog formation potential savings, acidification potential savings, material conservation, cost savings for non-hazardous solid waste disposal, water consumption savings, eutrophication potential savings, and energy cost savings.

GEC developed the EPEAT Benefits Calculator with the support of the Eastern Research Group (ERG). ERG previously developed and maintained the US EPA Electronics Environmental Benefits Calculator. GEC established an external technical review panel comprised of representatives from government, academia, research institutes, industry, and organizations purchasing IT products to review the data, assumptions, and analysis underlying the benefits calculator.

Need assistance connecting your organization's sustainability priorities to EPEAT criteria?

Contact PurchaserResources@greenelectronicscouncil.org
