



## SUSTAINABLE PURCHASING AND CONSUMERISM

### Selective Purchasing Guide

#### BACKGROUND

“In our captivity we treat the earth as a boundless warehouse and allow the powerful to exploit its bounties to their own ends,” [reads](#) the ELCA social statement on environment (p. 3) reflecting on Amos 5:6-15.

As people of faith, we are called to ensure that economic processes respect environmental limits while also distributing goods to fill our neighbors’ needs. The decisions we make about what we need, what and where we buy it and how we use it are part of those processes. Excess and misguided consumption further contributes to the irresponsible exploitation of God’s creation. Through intentional economic life we can help sustain humans and the rest of creation — now and for the future.

#### ELCA SOCIAL TEACHING

[Caring for Creation: Vision, Hope, and Justice](#), 1993 social statement  
“As members of this church, we commit ourselves to personal life styles that contribute to the health of the environment. Many organizations provide materials to guide us in examining possibilities and making changes appropriate to our circumstances” (p. 8).

[Sufficient, Sustainable Livelihood for All](#), 1999 social statement  
“What is sufficient in providing for people’s wants often is in tension with what can be sustained over time. Sustainability has implications for how we evaluate economic activity in terms of its ongoing effects on the wellbeing of both nature and human communities. Economic life should help sustain humans and the rest of creation — now and in the future” (p. 14).

“We are called to be stewards of what God has given for the sake of all. This stewardship includes holding economic, political, and social processes and institutions responsible for producing and distributing what is needed for sufficiency for all” (p. 11).

“We commit ourselves as a church and urge members to: use less, re-use, recycle, and restore natural resources” (p. 15).

**Corporate Social Responsibility in the ELCA uses the tools of screening of investments, shareholder advocacy and community investing to work with corporations, calling them to ensure that people are treated fairly and with dignity and to create sustainable communities.**

**More at [ELCA.org/CSR](https://www.elca.org/CSR).**

## ARTICLES

“Consumption, Ethics and the Environment: A Lutheran Perspective,” [www.elca.org/JLE/Articles/99](http://www.elca.org/JLE/Articles/99)

“Pray for Me. Pray for the Earth.,” [www.gathermagazine.org/pray-for-me-pray-for-the-earth/](http://www.gathermagazine.org/pray-for-me-pray-for-the-earth/)

“Issue-based Advocacy: Finance/Consumption,” [lutheransrestoringcreation.org/advocacy/issue-based-advocacy/finance-consumption/](http://lutheransrestoringcreation.org/advocacy/issue-based-advocacy/finance-consumption/)

“The Story of Stuff” (20-minute video), [www.storyofstuff.org/movies/story-of-stuff/](http://www.storyofstuff.org/movies/story-of-stuff/)

## THINK BEFORE YOU BUY

“We consume goods and use services to meet our needs. To increase consumption and expand sales, businesses stimulate ever new *wants*. Rather than human need shaping consumption, advertising and media promotion both shape and expand *wants*. Our very being becomes expressed through what we have or desire to possess. When consuming to meet basic needs turns into consumerism as an end in itself, we face a serious crisis of faith” (*Sufficient, Sustainable Livelihood for All*, p. 13).

### *Do I need to buy this?*

1. Am I being swayed by our consumer culture or by marketing into believing I need something I do not?
  - Is there something else I could use or recycle instead of buying a new one?
  - Could I put off buying it just a little longer?
2. What impact will this purchase have on the environment?
  - What environmental impact does the sourcing of raw materials have?
  - How much pollution does its production involve?
  - How much pollution does its operation involve?
3. What impact will this purchase have on the people who produce it?
  - Are human rights violations common in the supply chain?
  - Are the raw materials sourced from conflict-affected areas?
  - What are the labor conditions in the country where it is produced?
4. What happens when I am finished with it?
  - Can someone else use it?
  - Is it possible to recycle it?

## ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

- [“Selective Purchasing Guide: Fair Trade”](#)
- [“Selective Purchasing Guide: Human Rights and Supply Chain”](#)
- [“Selective Purchasing Guide: Information Technology”](#)
- [“Selective Purchasing Guide: Researching Corporate Activity”](#)