

Sustainable uniforms for the French Navy

MINISTRY OF DEFENCE, FRANCE

Procurement objectives

The Ministry of Defence procures a broad range of equipment and supplies for the French Navy, Army and Air Force. It is responsible for clothing 240,000 people and its annual expenditure in this category amounts to some €170 million.

As a major purchaser in the clothing sector, the Ministry saw the opportunity to promote its objectives in the field of sustainable development by introducing procurement criteria targeting environmental and social impacts along the clothing production line. On the basis of the initial results, the Ministry is preparing a new tender which will be even more ambitious in terms of scope and inclusion of sustainable development criteria.

Background

In 2010 a pilot procurement was launched, with sustainability criteria included in both the technical specifications and award criteria. The weighting of 20 percent in the award scheme for sustainability considerations was the highest applied by a French public body in the purchase of clothing.

The results of this pilot procurement have indicated that it is possible to include comprehensive environmental and social requirements in this type of tender. Further work with suppliers, other purchasers and external auditors can help promote this approach.



Criteria used

A notice was published in the Official Journal in April 2010 to establish a single-operator framework agreement. The framework was divided into two lots for the supply of between 36 000 and 150 000 cotton knit jerseys over a period of three years.

Subject matter of the contract:

Supply of service-standard cotton knitwear incorporating sustainable development criteria

Technical specifications:

Lot 1: Supply of industry standard blue cotton jerseys

Toxicity: hazardous substances must not be used in the production process or present in the final product in amounts above the below thresholds:

- Aromatic amines in azo dyes < 30ppm
- Azo dyes <1000 ppm
- Cadmium (in polymer coating) <100 ppm
- Formaldehyde (cas : 50-00-0) < 75 ppm

pH range: 4.5 < pH < 7.5

Lot 2: Supply of organic blue cotton jerseys

Cotton must be produced by an organic method of agriculture which conforms with [Council Regulation No. 834/2007 of 28.6.2007](#).

Toxicity: hazardous substances must not be used in the production process or present in the final product (as Lot 1)

pH range: 4.5 < pH < 7.5

Verification:

The [Oeko-Tex label](#) will be accepted as evidence of conformity with the requirements regarding hazardous substances, as will test results from an accredited laboratory or other equivalent forms of evidence. For Lot 2 the [EU Ecolabel](#) will be accepted as will other equivalent forms of evidence.

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Award criteria:

Technical quality – 45%

Price – 35%

Sustainable development – 20%

The criterion of sustainable development was divided into two sub-criteria, relating to i) control of substances used in production and ii) environmental management along the entire supply chain for the products being purchased. Bidders were assessed on the basis of the evidence submitted of their action on these two points.

Contract performance clauses:

The contractor and its subcontractors must comply with the eight core conventions of the [International Labour Organisation](#). Within four months of award of contract, and on each renewal, the contractor must provide a report detailing how 11 criteria based on social requirements of the [SA 8000 standard](#) are being met. A checklist of these requirements is included in an annex to the contract. Non-compliance with these provisions will result in penalties and/or termination of the contract.

Results

In previous tender procedures, a weighting of 60% had been given to technical quality and 40% to price. Due to the homogeneity in the quality of offers received, this meant that in practice price was the deciding factor. The introduction of 20% of the marks for sustainability considerations thus changed the basis for competition amongst suppliers. 28 suppliers requested the tender documents and two bids were received for each of the two lots.

In terms of cost, the price of conventional cotton (Lot 1) was 2% lower than previous tenders while the cost for organic cotton was 22% higher than the conventional cotton. To verify compliance with the contract performance clauses, the Ministry relies upon the services of a firm specialising in social auditing.

Environmental impacts

The main environmental impacts addressed in this tender are the use of toxic and hazardous substances in the production process for textiles. The production of non-organic cotton is an intensive agricultural process, with the use of pesticides and mineral fertilisers affecting soil and water quality and biodiversity, as well as generating greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions. The inappropriate use of certain substances involved in the processing of fibres and final textile products (such as dyes and flame retardants) can degrade air, soil and water quality. These substances can also have a negative impact on the occupational health of users where they remain as residues in the textiles.

Lessons learned

The 2006 French public procurement code calls for the integration of sustainable development principles into public contracts. The purchase of clothing was one of the areas prioritised in 2009, with environmental, social and traceability considerations to be addressed. The pilot has demonstrated the possibility of doing this, however some elements will be given greater attention in future tenders. In particular:

- Expectations regarding the reduction of waste in the finishing process will be clarified
- Maximum thresholds for toxicity will be specified, with the relevant period and unit of measurement
- Evidence of the treatment process for hazardous waste will be requested
- For screen-printed garments, the absence of cadmium should be established
- Traceability of raw materials through production process: each site should be specified

A survey of the suppliers who requested the documents but did not submit a tender was carried out, which found that the relatively low price of cotton was in some cases not considered to merit investment in a sustainable supply chain. However, it is hoped that the continued practice of giving sustainable development a high weighting in tender evaluation will help encourage more suppliers to make this investment.