

Crafts Fair Environmental Considerations

Introduction

As a program of the Ecology Center we put a strong emphasis on what is sold at the Berkeley Farmers' Markets being sustainably produced. For instance, most of the produce sold at our Markets is organically grown and we require that prepared foods have ingredients that are 80% or more organically grown, or 80% or more purchased from our farmers. We are also moving toward eliminating nearly all plastic packaging and furthering the notion that the best choice between a plastic and a paper bag is no bag at all. Beyond craft fair items being well made and beautiful, we would like to see the high standards we have set for the Farmers' Markets mirrored in our Crafts Fairs. We want what's best for customers, crafters, and the environment as a whole. The points brought up below are only suggestions and not mandatory rules, but we hope that each crafter will consider what he or she might do differently that would decrease the negative impact of their craft, lower its carbon footprint, and how it could be produced more sustainably. We would also like crafters to communicate with us and their customers, via word-of-mouth and/or signage, if they are using known toxics. And we want our crafters to be able to proudly and loudly proclaim how green their products are and we want to be able to brag about them in the same way. Each craft has its own issues, but below are some points worthy of consideration.

Jewelry

The biggest problem with jewelry is the presence of toxic materials in the jewelry itself—primarily dioxins, lead and other heavy metals. "Fimo" (plasticized polymers) off-gases dioxins when heated or worn in the sun. "Precious Metal Clay" or "PMC" has the same issue and lead. It would be best if all jewelers tested everything they purchase for lead. This includes "Tibetan" silver (lead-based silver), Pewter (lead is a major component of the metal), "German Silver" (also contains lead) and old solder, sometimes found on antique jewelry. Modern solder shouldn't contain lead, unless the jeweler is using solder meant for stained glass, which does have lead. It would be best if things that are pre-soldered (chains, pendants, pins, etc.) were tested for lead, especially if they come from outside the US. Even some glass or crystal pieces, and some dyed pearls and stones may have had lead added to the dyes to make them more shiny.

The best way to test for lead and other problems is to first pour boiling water over the pieces to clean them and then let them soak (unless it's wooden) for a few hours. If the stones have been dyed, it gets rid of the excess dye, and cleans out anything that the stones or pearls may have been exposed to in processing. When dry it gets tested using a lead-test swab.

Since stones and pearls come from all over the world, it is very difficult to create criteria for these materials based on distance, since they usually travel without a manifest showing their origin. Though some gem vendors will disclose where things are mined and where they purchase things from, usually once it leaves the place of origin, it's impossible to tell the location without extensive chemical analysis. Many gems and semi-precious stones also come from countries we don't necessarily want to be doing business with due to their horrendous human rights records and lack of environmental standards. Most of the tracking that is being done is of diamonds and gold which none of the jewelers applying for our Crafts Fairs have ever been using, but generally speaking other gem stones and metals share the same issues. There is something called the Kimberley Process Certification Scheme (KPCS) that imposes extensive requirements on its members to enable them to certify shipments of rough diamonds as "conflict-free." The Conflict-Free Diamond Council defines a diamond as "conflict-free" if "its profit is not used to fund war, and it is mined

and produced under ethical conditions.” While that is a good thing, according to greenKarat.com, it doesn't go nearly far enough as even the most benign diamond and gold mining tends to seriously degrade the environment. They advocate using only synthetic diamonds and recycled gold. Though their primary focus is on gold and diamonds they want to have a broader impact on the ethics of jewelry making and say, “Part of our plan for ecological awareness also includes facilitating discussion among artists and jewelry manufacturers regarding ecological practices which can be employed during the crafting of a piece of jewelry. Metalsmiths utilize chemicals and have waste disposal issues with ecological implications. greenKarat plans to help the community discuss, develop and implement standards to be employed at the jeweler's bench.” We also want to further that discussion and raise environmental standards.

Cloth

Crafts that involve cloth we can clearly see as having a direct correlation with what is already sold at the Berkeley Farmers' Markets. We would say that probably the best choice is organically grown cotton and it's even better if it was locally grown in California. While cotton is always a “natural fiber” conventionally grown cotton is the world's most sprayed crop and accounts for about 25% of worldwide pesticide use. Many Berkeley Farmers' Markets shoppers are willing to pay more for something, like organically grown cotton, that they know is better for the health of the environment and for their own health. Hemp can be easily organically grown for fiber, but the federal government won't allow it to be grown in this country because the plant is related to marijuana (even though it can't get you high). So, you can only buy hemp cloth as an import. Silk is also a natural fiber that can be easily non-toxically produced, but is always an expensive import. Organic wool is now available. Wool is a wonderful natural fiber, but clearly works well only for some uses. The problem with all synthetic cloth is that it is linked to the petroleum industry and its many negative impacts. Some arguments can be legitimately made for polar fleece as eco-friendly if the source can guarantee that it's a recycled product (from #1 soda bottles) and not made from virgin material. A newly available option that is generally a good choice is cloth made from bamboo.

Paper products

When you use paper products we urge everyone, whenever possible, to use 100% post-consumer recycled paper or paper that is not made from trees. Of course, any recycled content is better than none at all, but if it's not post-consumer recycled content, then as far as we're concerned, it isn't really recycled. Most non-tree based papers (hemp, kenaf, cotton, bamboo, etc.) are usually a better environmental choice than those made from trees, though cotton and hemp have the drawbacks that were pointed out in the previous section on cloth.

Paint

We know that many paint products are used for a specific look associated with that product, but we would ask our craft vendors to remember that using oil paint is generally the most toxic, next acrylic paints, and the least toxic is using water colors and other naturally based paints (including milk paint). What tends to make oils paints the worst is the solvent (usually turpentine/mineral spirits) that is used to thin them and clean up after their use. With all paints, no matter what their base, the pigments that give them color are responsible for the most toxic ingredients. These ingredients include mercury, cadmium, lead, chromates, arsenic, barium, etc. All of these it would be best to totally avoid. Though acrylic paints can be thinned with water they are plastic products and not environmentally totally benign. Reading labels can tell one about the VOCs (volatile organic compounds) in paint and one's nose will generally confirm the higher VOC content as it will smell worse. Paints with low or no VOCs are better for the environment. Another way to know about the toxicity of materials is that the Art and Creative Materials Institute (ACMI) certifies paints with product seals on three levels: 1. CP Certified Product Seal for paint that is non-toxic

even if ingested. This is their highest rating for non-toxicity and performance. 2. AP Approved Product Seal for paint as nontoxic even if ingested. They may receive an AP Seal if there are currently no performance standards for that product type. 3. HL Health Label Seal (Caution Required) for paint that contains a material(s) in sufficient quantities that it has the potential to be an acute or chronic health hazard.

Ceramics

Some of the issues brought up by ceramics primarily relate to the immediate studio environment and the health of the potter, but any use of toxic substances has impacts on the greater environment as well. The toxic substances used in ceramics are often the same problem ingredients as in paint. Some of the worst are: barium carbonate (shouldn't be used for foodware), cadmium (again in pigment), chromates & chromic acid, cobalt oxide & carbonate, copper, ferrous sulphite, iron chromate, lead (should never be used for foodware), potassium dichromate/bichromate (not recommended for foodware), and uranium compounds. Though some of the most beautiful glazes include lead as an ingredient it would be better for the environment if lead glazes were phased out altogether.

Of course, it also takes a lot of energy to fire a kiln. So it is best to fire pieces as little as possible. One of our vendors last year had the solution for this in using a kiln powered by solar panels.

Body Products

Many mass marketed body products contain dangerous chemicals and/or chemicals that have never been safety tested. This even includes some products that contain organic ingredients. When an ingredient list simply says "fragrance" then the product usually contains phthalates. Phthalates are endocrine disruptors as are parabens which are used as preservatives in cosmetics. Another nasty chemical that is common in body products is propylene glycol which is used as a "penetration enhancer." Along with the previously mentioned chemicals there are many others, but these are the worst of the most common ones. It is unlikely, though not impossible, that independent crafts people would be using these chemicals. It is more likely that crafters might be using synthetic aromatics (fragrance oils such as aroma chemicals compounded into carriers such as isopropyl myristate, dipropylene glycol, diethyl phthalate, et al) that persist in the environment. Nitro musks and musk ketones have been found in soil, water, and fish, and do not degrade. Naturally-derived aromatics are the preferred alternative to synthetics. Natural aromatics such as essential oils (steam- and hydro-distilled from leaves, woods, flowers and seeds), floral absolutes such as rose and jasmine (solvent-extracted), and carbon dioxide extractions (of leaves, woods, flowers and seeds) are positive alternatives to the synthetic realm of scenting. There are also hydrocarbon extractions such as phytols, solvent-extracted concretes full of plant waxes, and simple maceration/infusion of plant material in stable oils. While natural aromatics are generally the best choice one should be aware of other factors in choosing these including that some plants like sandalwood are extinct in some countries and on the verge of extinction in others, that palm oil from Malaysia comes at the price of loss of orangutan habitat, that rosewood essential oil from Brazil is a product of deforestation, etc. Synthetic detergents such as sodium laureth sulfate should be eschewed in favor of gentler detergents like those derived from coconut oil. Of course, anytime that a plant-based ingredient (olive oil, herbs, alcohol, etc.) is used we recommend that it be organically grown or sustainably wildcrafted, and not genetically modified or imported (and if it must be imported we recommend that it be fair trade certified).

Wood

There is a lot of bad forestry being practiced, so we would ask our craft vendors and everyone else to try to be aware where wood has been sourced from. Please don't buy anything sourced from old growth forests unless it is a salvaged product. Most imported tropical hardwoods (mahogany, teak, ebony, etc.) are also very bad environmental choices. There is wood available that has been sustainably harvested and certified by the Forest

Stewardship Council (FSC) and there are dealers specializing in old growth woods that have been salvaged from a number of different sources.

Candles

We have beeswax candles available year around at the Saturday Berkeley Farmers' Market from our honey vendors, so this is not an item we would normally include in our Crafts Fairs. In our Farmers' Market polices we prohibit the sale of genetically modified fruits, vegetables, and animal products and of any prepared foods with genetically modified ingredients. We have not allowed soy candles to be sold at our Fairs because no vendor has been able to prove that their soy wax is not from a genetically modified source.

Leather

It should be clear why vegetarians and vegans are likely to have objections to items made from leather since these could not exist without an animal being killed. And, it should be well known that a plant-based diet is generally kinder to the environment than a meat-based diet. But, we do sell sustainably raised meat at the Berkeley Farmers' Markets and we realize that small amounts of meat can contribute to a healthy diet and if we are going to eat meat then we should be using all of any creature we kill including its skin. Traditional leather tanning was often foul smelling, but modern leather preparation involves the use of numerous toxic chemicals. It may not be easy to find, but there is "organic leather" out there. It comes from the hides of animals that are organically fed and humanely raised and is prepared with tanning processes that use plant tannins or smoke to cure the leather.

Photography

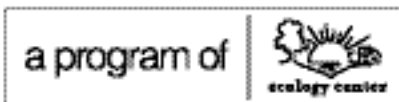
While it might superficially appear that digital photography is less toxic than the obviously nasty chemicals used in developing tradition film, digital cameras and computers involve the use of highly toxic semiconductor products and it takes a lot of gear just to look at digital pictures before anything is printed. And, as we've all seen these technologies are frequently being updated with the old models being discarded, while a high quality traditional camera could be expected to last for decades. The currently commonly used photographic "paper" is resin coated with nasty chemicals and has so little fiber in it that it just becomes a pollutant in the paper recycling stream. Computer printer inks have many of the same environmental drawbacks as paints and dyes mentioned previously. Also computers and printers use significant amounts of electrical energy. So, though digital technology has clearly brought us into a new era of photography it does not have a totally benign footprint.

Help

For craft vendors who would like assistance with any of the issues raised in this piece the Ecology Center's Information Program and the Berkeley Farmers' Market staff can be helpful in locating additional sources for the alternatives mentioned. Also, I would appreciate more input on clarifying these standards and any ideas on how best to realize them.

Kirk Lumpkin, Special Events & Promotions Coordinator
Berkeley Farmers' Market
kirk@ecologycenter.org
(510) 548-2220 ext. 227

Beck Cowles, Information Services Manager
beck@ecologycenter.org
(510) 548-2220 ext. 233



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