



Questions for Your Supplier When Changing Brands or Products

Minnesota Technical Assistance Program ■ FACT SHEET

New! Improved! Better Than the Other Brand!

Magazines, direct mail pieces and vendors constantly ask you to switch brands or purchase new products entering the marketplace. These products may benefit your operation, but you need to be savvy about how to evaluate them. In addition to evaluating performance, evaluate their environmental, health and safety impact. Here are some guidelines to help.

Samples

Require a material safety data sheet (MSDS) before accepting any sample. Be aware of all the health and safety hazards of the product. Before accepting samples, ask your supplier the following questions.

- What safety precautions should be followed? Does the product require special precautions for employee use?
- Can the supplier provide complete information about employee exposure and waste disposal? MSDSs do not always provide complete information.
- How many years have the chemicals been used in a work environment? The longer the track record, the better the health and safety information.
- Does the supplier take back unused samples? Don't accumulate samples that you will have to pay to dispose of later.
- What is the smallest sample size available for testing in your shop?

Process and Procedure Effects

Changing products may affect processes and procedures. Before changing products ask your supplier the following questions.

- Will the new product require equipment changes? For example, changing from solvent to waterbased paint may require corrosion resistant equipment.
- Will the new product require procedure changes? For example, changing cleaning solvents at a printer may alter the drying time required between print runs.

- Will the change increase the use of energy or water? What will this cost?
- Are the instructions easy for operators to understand and follow? Will the supplier train employees to use the product correctly and effectively at your company?
- What support will the vendor provide during the early production runs to work through any problems?

Leftover Inventory

Before switching to a new product, deplete your current supply to reduce excess inventory.

If you have unopened or unexpired materials, suppliers may buy them back. Or, the Minnesota Materials Exchange can help identify other businesses who can use common products that fit these criteria. For more information about the Materials Exchange call 612/624-1300 or 800/247-0015. Or, visit <www.mnexchange.org> to list items or search for the most current available and wanted items.

Waste/By-product Evaluation

Learn what waste or by-products will be generated as a result of using new products in your process. Before changing products ask your supplier the following questions.

- Is the product regulated as hazardous when disposed of? If so, is a nonhazardous alternative available?
- Has a hazardous waste evaluation been done on the leftover or spent material or by-products? If not, be prepared to spend the time and money to complete a satisfactory evaluation.

If the supplier has waste evaluation data, ask:

- Was testing done on more than one sample taken from more than one company location after the product had been used as intended?

- Has the supplier requested feedback from the Minnesota Pollution Control Agency (MPCA) or a county hazardous waste official about the testing protocol and results from the waste evaluation?

Waste Disposal

Before changing products ask your supplier the following questions about handling hazardous and nonhazardous waste generated by the new product.

Hazardous waste

- Does the supplier offer a waste management program using permitted facilities and proper shipping and tracking? If so, this could greatly simplify meeting your environmental regulatory requirements.

Nonhazardous waste

- Can the supplier provide information about correct waste management procedures?
- Does the supplier have a program in place for disposal or recycling? If so, does the company provide written proof of proper disposal?

Other Environmental Requirements

When changing products, ensure that they meet all environmental requirements affecting your company. Ask your supplier the following questions about requirements and ask about any additional requirements your company must meet.

Air emissions or Toxic Release Inventory (TRI)

- Volatile organic compounds (VOCs) or other chemicals may be released from the new products. Can the supplier provide information necessary for reporting or tracking to meet air permitting requirements or complete TRI reports?

Wastewater discharges

- Can the supplier tell you if approval is needed to sewer the wastewater? Before sewerage, remember to confirm approval with your sewer authority. You cannot discharge industrial wastewater to a septic system or the storm sewer.

Other environmental reporting

- Can the supplier tell you if other reporting is required for storage or use of its product?

For More Information

MnTAP has a variety of technical assistance services available to help Minnesota businesses implement industry-tailored solutions that prevent pollution at the source, maximize efficient use of resources, and reduce energy use and cost. Our information resources are available online at <mntap.umn.edu>. Or, call MnTAP at 612/624-1300 or 800/247-0015 from greater Minnesota for personal assistance.

Value of Service

Select your suppliers with service and product innovation in mind. Hundreds of companies will take your order and supply exactly the product you ask for. But, only some companies take the time to learn your business and suggest alternative approaches and different kinds of equipment that will get the job done faster, easier and cheaper.

Good service may cost a little more, but it can pay dividends

in reduced hassles, product use and disposal costs. Seek long-term value. The benefits of a long-term relationship with a supplier may include:

- Help troubleshooting and making process improvements.
- Quick and easy access to improved products.
- Help managing your inventory and training employees to maximize material use, reducing waste costs.

- Product delivery in quantities you need, when you need them.
- Product packaging in easy-to-use containers that can be returned for refill, reused or recycled.
- Help with environmental health and safety compliance and proper waste management.