



International  
Olympic  
Committee

# SUSTAINABLE SOURCING FACT SHEET - SPORT EQUIPMENT

NOVEMBER 2025



In collaboration with



# SPORT EQUIPMENT

## Background

This Sustainable Sourcing Fact Sheet has been developed to provide core and recommended criteria and guidance to sport organisations on what should be considered in sourcing and procurement decisions related to key categories of products and services.

Individuals responsible for sourcing/ procuring decisions and activities should review this Sustainable Sourcing Fact Sheet alongside the 'Sustainability Essentials' guide: ['Sustainable Sourcing in Sport'](#).

## Scope

This Sustainable Sourcing Fact Sheet covers Suppliers of Sports Equipment. This means organisations involved in manufacturing and supplying sporting goods (including installation and services). In the organised sport movement, it is common for approved or sole supply arrangements to be in place for sports equipment.

This document should be read alongside the Sustainable Sourcing Fact Sheet on 'Wood and Wood-Based Products' (e.g., wood-based equipment and installations, packaging and consumables) and 'Textiles and Textile-Based Products' (e.g., upholstered items, fabric for matting or surfacing).

## Sustainability fundamentals

Natural resources, including materials, water, and energy, are the basis for sustaining society. In recent decades, the global economy has experienced much growth. Over this period there has been many societal benefits including extreme poverty halving from 1990 to 2015. However, the global population is estimated to increase to around 8 billion by 2030, probably to over 9 billion by 2050, with increases in average wealth further raising the demand for products and services.

The activities of the large and growing human population is eroding many natural resources, while a large part of the global population is still struggling to meet basic needs. Organisations are likely to face intense competition for a wide range of material resources that become less easily available. Even now, some materials, such as rare earth elements and other critical raw materials, are subject to supply pressure and price volatility.

Exploitative conditions often exist within sports equipment supply chains, potentially giving rise to so-called modern slavery such as instances of bonded and forced labour. These include document confiscation, debt bondage, verbal and physical abuse, unauthorised wage deductions and underage work. Workers can face unsafe conditions, low wages and discrimination, often unable to raise concerns. Environmental costs include climate impacts, impacts to land, freshwater and oceans (e.g., plastics pollution) and loss of biodiversity.

For sports equipment, there can be a tension between sustainability and performance. Advances based on new processes and high-performance, often composite materials can (and unintentionally) result in a shorter life cycle and be a challenge to recycle. In the case of balls, many are made of leather – according to this [BBC news article](#) it takes 35,000 cow hides to make the 700,000 balls used in an NFL season – while use of rubber and plastic is also widespread with many ending up



in landfill or the ocean. The 2022 FIFA's World Cup ball even had a microchip, adding more materials and recycling complications.

The sector will need to invest in more circular models and strategies for reuse and recycling, both for fabric sourcing and product end of life.

While we may see a slowdown in demand for 'stuff' in the developed world, this will be countered by rises in living standards elsewhere. Evidence points to consumption patterns needing several planets worth of resources.

Our climate needs to be stabilised, freshwater preserved, land regenerated, oceans and biodiversity made healthier. This needs to be in line with what science defines as Earth's limits and be socially equitable too. This is not ideology; in today's world a more resilient and sustainable business is likely a necessity.

This may present a future ethical dilemma. Should increasingly hard to access resources be prioritised for basic 'needs' like food and shelter or rather for 'wants' of sectors such as the global sports marketplace? While this may seem a gloomy and stark vision of the future – on the other hand the opportunity for growth linked to purposeful business and sustainable innovation is huge.

## Global policy context

Globally, there is an exponential growth of sustainability related regulations and growing recognition of the benefits of resource efficiency and the circular economy to advance more sustainable consumption and production patterns. This is essential to achieving the [UN Sustainable Development Goals](#).

Globally, regulators are responding with actions aimed at catalysing on this. Several territories in Asia (China, Malaysia, Thailand, Vietnam) have moved to ban solid waste imports such as plastics. The EU is progressing an ambitious [Circular Economy Action Plan](#) and a chemical strategy aimed at phasing out harmful substances in consumer products. Regulation to advance net zero goals, tackle deforestation and modern slavery and punish greenwashing are other examples. The world of sport, like any other sector, will be impacted by this exponential growth in sustainability related legislation.



There is growing demand by customers for more sustainable solutions. [Research](#) carried out by the World Federation of Sporting Goods Industry (WFGSI) in collaboration with McKinsey suggests sustainability is moving from the margins of the sports goods industry to 'table stakes', with companies under pressure to ensure they meet high sustainability standards.

Consumers are increasingly aware and proactive in making more sustainable choices, opting for brands with demonstrable sustainability credentials and no longer purchasing from those who do not. This cultural shift applies whether it's a lifestyle consumer, grassroots athlete, or elite athlete.

As with other sectors, the surge in demand for more sustainable options means sports goods brands are investing more in sustainability, with some even pivoting their businesses to become more purpose driven.

In parallel, there has been a rise in green claims regulation in several markets. Enforcement action has begun by regulators against brands for so-called greenwashing (misleading claims or virtue signalling). While certain sectors (e.g., fashion, fast-moving consumer goods) have been scrutinised most – any could become a priority, such as sports.

Notwithstanding initiatives spearheaded by the IOC, in general there are few meaningful sustainability partnerships and collaborations in the sports goods sector compared to other sectors such as food and fashion. Examples specific to the sporting goods industry include the [WFGSI](#) or the [adidas' partnership with Parley for the Oceans](#). [Centre for Sport and Human Rights](#), [Sports for Climate Action Framework](#) and [Sports for Nature Initiative](#) are then examples of collaborative frameworks focusing on sustainability in sport more generally.



The sector faces continual scrutiny and in some cases campaign action by trade unions and NGOs on several topics, notably labour and human rights.

### Certification

There are some sustainability standards of relevance to sports goods.

Credible standards allow organisations to develop sustainable sourcing policies and commitments by providing a transparent and impartial assurance system. Standards with chain of custody models allow companies to better understand where products come from.

Standards of relevance to suppliers of sports equipment include [B Corporation](#), [Fairtrade](#), [Organic](#), [Cradle 2 Cradle](#), [Better Cotton Initiative \(BCI\)](#), and [Forest Stewardship Council \(FSC\)](#).

[The Standards Map database](#) has information on over 300 standards, codes of conduct and audit protocols addressing sustainability issues in global supply chains. It aims to help organisations review and compare a wide range of standards and requirements through user-friendly online navigation and searching.

### Marketing and labelling

The use of third-party logos (e.g., [Organic](#), [FSC](#), [Fairtrade](#)) is strictly controlled so the necessary licenses or permissions must be obtained from the corresponding certification or licensing body prior to their use for communications or promotional purposes.

Further guidance on claims and declarations is provided on p54-55 of the 'Sustainability Essentials' guide: ['Sustainable Sourcing in Sport'](#).

## Sustainable Sourcing Criteria and Sustainable Supplier Questionnaire

The core and recommended criteria for Suppliers of Sports Equipment are set out below. There are two levels of sustainability performance:

- **Core criteria** – refers to minimum sustainability requirements that are advised to be met
- **Recommended criteria** – refers to criteria that goes beyond minimum sustainability requirements to promote higher levels of environmental and social responsibility and advance sports' sustainability vision and goals

Criteria is intended to be jurisdictionally neutral and therefore should be able to be applied in any country or region. In the unlikely event of a conflict with national or regional legislation, the law shall always be complied with and prevail. Individuals tasked with sourcing/procurement should seek to meet the most demanding requirements wherever possible.

### Sustainable Supplier Questionnaire

In addition to the Sustainable Sourcing Criteria, a Sustainable Supplier Questionnaire & Scorecard has been developed to be sent to suppliers during the RFP process. [Refer to these within the IOC sustainability library.](#)

This supplementary questionnaire is designed to be launched during tender processes, providing deeper insights into suppliers' sustainability objectives, priorities, and performance. The questions related to the criteria are outlined in the table below. Detailed guidance for each criterion is available to assist in assessing the responses, as part of the evaluation scorecard.

### Sustainability Categories

Key: Climate Nature People Pollution

	Core Criteria	Additional Guidance	RFP Question Reference
	Suppliers of sports equipment must: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>take all reasonable steps to ensure that items produced and / or services supplied are in accordance with all International Labour Organisation (ILO) conventions (e.g., labour standards, working conditions and the use of child labour) and internationally recognised human rights standards as defined by the UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights;</li> <li>disclose primary or first tier supply chains (e.g., final finishing and assembly locations, providers of contracted labour on venue, packaging and componentry, warehousing etc); and</li> <li>provide an appropriate level of evidence that such sites meet the standards set out in (a) including its approach to conducting human rights due diligence.</li> </ol>	The 'Sustainability Essentials' guide: <a href="#">'Sustainable Sourcing in Sport'</a> provides further guidance on this topic (e.g., template Sustainable Sourcing Code and how compliance might be assessed).  For example, it might be appropriate to require suppliers to register on the <a href="#">Supplier Ethical Data Exchange (Sedex)</a> and ensure that the final finishing and assembly locations are disclosed, all Self-Assessment Questionnaire modules are completed and made accessible/visible. Self-Assessment Questionnaire modules cover the following topics: Labour Standards, Business Integrity, Health and Safety and the Environment.	(a) I. Standard Questionnaire: Question 11  (b) IV. Sports Equipment: Question 1  (c) I. Standard Questionnaire: Question 12

	<p>Direct suppliers of sports equipment are required to have appropriate independently certified management systems in place which meet internationally recognised standards which covers the scope of their service provision.</p>	<p>Independently certified systems are preferred – if suppliers do not have this, they need to demonstrate how they meet the standards. ISO 20121-24 certification is preferred for suppliers which specialise in events. Other acceptable standards include ISO 9001 and ISO 14001. Industry specific schemes may also be acceptable.</p>	<p>I. Standard Questionnaire: Question 10</p>
	<p>Suppliers describe steps taken to reduce the use and impact of chemicals which pose a risk to human health and the environment used in connection with sports equipment and prevent such substances being released into the environment.</p>	<p>Evidence may include the presence of Product Restricted Substances Lists and Manufacturing Restricted Substances Lists and in the case of textile-based materials signatory of the <a href="#">Zero Discharge Hazardous Substances (ZDHC) initiative</a>.</p> <p><b>NOTE:</b> Suppliers in the EU or placing products on the EU market should be expected to declare the presence of any REACH Candidate List substances at a concentration of greater than 0.1% (weight by weight) in finished product</p>	<p>IV. Sports Equipment: Question 2</p>
	<p>Suppliers must declare if microplastics are or could be perceived to be issued with equipment and, where relevant set out measures to reduce potential microplastic pollution including use phase actions.</p>	<p>Synthetic textiles are a significant source of microplastic pollution, but other aspects of sports equipment may give rise to microplastics (e.g., use of specialised chemicals).</p>	<p>IV. Sports Equipment: Question 3</p>
	<p>Sports equipment which uses energy or water is expected to be highly energy and water efficient.</p>	<p>Wherever possible, recognised energy and water efficiency standards should be used; where this is not possible, the supplier must benchmark equipment against closest equivalent competitor products.</p>	<p>IV. Sports Equipment: Question 4</p>
	<p>Suppliers using contracted labour for services connected with the supply of sports equipment must subscribe to the Employer Pays Principle to ensure that no recruitment fees are paid directly or indirectly in whole or in part by workers used to support catering services and only legally approved or certified recruitment agencies are used.</p>	<p>Fees and costs associated with recruitment and employment should be paid by the employer, not the employee.</p>	<p>I. Standard Questionnaire: Question 13</p>
	<p>Sports equipment must be inclusive by design where practicable and fully accessible to people with a wide range of individual needs.</p>		

	Suppliers must demonstrate how sports equipment has been designed for durability, upgradeability and reparability without compromising on performance.	Materials used in sports equipment – particularly composite – present technological challenges when no longer required, as they cannot be readily recycled at an acceptable cost or value.	IV. Sports Equipment: Question 5
	Sports equipment items branded specific to an event or sports organisation must be designed so that any logos or distinctive identification features can be easily removed or overprinted without damaging the item to facilitate usage when no longer required.	Strategies should be pursued which prolong the life of the equipment for as long as possible.	IV. Sports Equipment: Question 6

	Recommended Criteria	Additional Guidance	RFP Question Reference
	Suppliers are expected to have measured their full scope Carbon Footprint in accordance with an internationally recognised methodology and provide evidence of this calculation upon request.	As a minimum a Carbon Footprint is expected to have been completed. However, a Life Cycle Assessment (LCA) which meets ISO 14040 is advised.	I. Standard Questionnaire: Question 33
	Preference should be given to suppliers that have or are committed to get carbon reduction targets approved by the Science Based Targets Initiative (SBTi) as being in line with the level of reduction needed to limit global warming to 1.5oC within a realistic timescale and provide evidence of carbon reductions upon request.	Further information on approved Science-based Targets (i.e. a reduction target to cut emissions in line with climate science covering Scope 1, 2 and 3 emissions) available here: <a href="https://sciencebasedtargets.org/">https://sciencebasedtargets.org/</a> . There is a streamlined process for smaller businesses.	I. Standard Questionnaire: Question 16
	Suppliers can demonstrate that they have mapped their full supply chains beyond their first tier supply chain covering processing facilities (e.g., sub-contractors, dyeing and wet processing, tanneries, etc.) and suppliers of raw materials such as fibres, hides, rubber, dyes, metals, etc. (e.g., raw material providers, farms, slaughter houses, sewing yarn suppliers, filament and staple, chemical suppliers, etc.).		IV. Sports Equipment: Question 1
	Use of any gases for purpose of refrigeration, fire suppression or specialist insulation or cushioning in or associated with sport equipment should contain low or zero Global Warming Potential (GWP) substances.	Low GWP substances are substances with a GWP of less than 150.  <b>NOTE:</b> It is assumed that equipment is unlikely to contain Ozone Depleting Substances because these have been banned in most territories.	

	Preference is given to temporary power solutions which utilise low/zero emission technologies.	Low/zero emission energy technologies focus on both limiting impacts to local air quality as well as limiting emissions of greenhouse gas emissions	
	Preference should be given to suppliers who have made a commitment to tackle key endemic social challenges in facing the sports equipment sector such as wages, working hours and forced labour	Examples of commitments may include engagement with industry level initiatives where they exist.	I. Standard Questionnaire: Question 11
	Opportunities to include micro or small and medium sized enterprises, social enterprises and other business local to service delivery are encouraged.		I. Standard Questionnaire: Question 14
  	Preference should be given to suppliers who have made a commitment to transition to a more circular manufacturing system or solutions within a 2025 – 2030 timeframe.	Examples of commitments may include: design strategies for cyclability, use of reused or recycled post-consumer material in equipment, mechanisms to collect used equipment for reuse or recycling, equipment refurbishing or remanufacturing strategies. Other strategies include pre-used or second-hand equipment where performance can be guaranteed and offering repair and maintenance services to increase the lifetime of equipment.	
   	Suppliers are encouraged to demonstrate their broader commitment to sustainability and the steps they are taking to become more purposeful.	This can be demonstrated in several ways – from being a signatory to the <a href="#">UN Global Compact</a> , agreeing to sector level voluntary commitments (e.g., <a href="#">Sports for Climate Action</a> ), through to either holding or working towards becoming a <a href="#">certified B Corporation</a> . Other steps include where supplier is engaging with sports governing bodies to advocate for more sustainable events or practices, such as challenging rules or requirements which unnecessarily conflict with sustainability goals.	I. Standard Questionnaire: Question 5

## Material Specific Requirements

Core Criteria		Additional Guidance	RFP Question Reference
	No endangered, vulnerable or protected species must be used in connection with sports equipment produced or supplied as defined in <a href="#">CITES (the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora) Appendices I, II and III</a> or <a href="#">IUCN Red List of Threatened Species</a>		IV. Sports Equipment: Question 8
   	Textile and Textile-Based components must meet the core criteria set out in the Textiles and Textiles-Based Products Sustainable Sourcing Fact Sheet.	This also covers animal and animal-derived and cellulosic materials.	III. Textile based products
   	Wood and Wood-Based components and any such material used in connection with sports equipment services including installation must meet the core criteria set out in the Wood and Wood-Based Products Sustainable Sourcing Fact Sheet.	Any non-timber forest componentry (e.g., rubber) should follow the criteria set out in the Wood and Wood-Based Products Sustainable Sourcing Fact Sheet.	II. Wood based products
 	Notwithstanding the often specialist nature of materials used, suppliers must demonstrate steps taken to mitigate the impact of any materials or componentry used within equipment at all stages of its use life.	This may include for example, use of lower impact or alternative materials (e.g., synthetic leather), reduction of virgin materials through use of post- consumer recycled content and ensuring all items can be reused or recycled at end of life (use).  <b>NOTE:</b> Any lower impact claims must be able to be substantiated, ideally by verified LCA.	

Recommended Criteria		Additional Guidance	RFP Question Reference
	Where possible, major/dominant materials used in equipment should come from more sustainable sources, with priority given to certified sources (where schemes or labels exist).	See above main commentary section including reference to <a href="#">the Standards Map database</a> . Materials certified vegan or vegetarian may also be appropriate to explore.	
	Preference should be given to equipment that does not contain polyvinyl chloride (PVC) and / or polycarbonate which contains Bisphenol A (BPA).	Two exceptions might be: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Supplier can show no other viable solutions exist to meet safety or performance requirements, demonstrate high sustainability standards of manufacture, and offers guaranteed and verifiable appropriate reuse and recycling options when items are no longer required; and</li> <li>• Supplier has already produced item (that is, no discernible impact shown to take place while it is in use) and proposes to lease it for a defined term after which time it can be returned to the supplier for subsequent hires.</li> </ul>	
	Preference should be given to suppliers that have formally committed to supporting the goals of a Global Plastic Partnership (or one of its official national networks), such as: the <a href="#">Plastics Pact Network</a> convened by the Ellen MacArthur Foundation and WRAP, and/or <a href="#">WEF Global Plastic Action Partnership (GPAP)</a>	This does not necessarily mean that suppliers are formal Plastics Pact signatories – but have at least made a public commitment to support the goals	IV. Sports Equipment: Question 7

## Waste, Packaging And Consumables

	Core Criteria	Additional Guidance	RFP Question Reference
  	The supplier must adhere to, and proactively support, arrangements which have been put in place to reduce and manage waste in accordance with the waste hierarchy.	The supplier is expected to outline how they will aspire to operate in a zero/low waste manner.  <b>NOTE:</b> The waste hierarchy gives top priority to preventing waste in first place. When waste is created, it gives priority to preparing it for reuse, then recycling, then recovery, and last of all disposal (e.g., landfill)	I. Standard Questionnaire: Question 35
  	Unless otherwise agreed, the use and / or supply of single-use plastics packaging or consumables is not permitted.	Single-use plastics are intended to only be used once before they are thrown away or recycled.  <b>NOTE:</b> Some territories have legally enforced bans in place for certain single-use plastics items.	I. Standard Questionnaire: Question 36
	All other single-use packaging and consumables is expected to be able to be easily reused or recycled in the market – items considered non-recyclable are not permitted unless the supplier puts in place special arrangements to collect and reuse or recycle such material.	Specific arrangements may be required to be in put in place by the supplier if recycling infrastructure is not currently in place in market.	I. Standard Questionnaire: Question 36
	Use of biodegradable and oxo-degradable products, components or materials (including film wrapping) are not permitted to be supplied.	Some materials (e.g., plastics) contain an additive which is intended to make them (bio)degrade over a period of time (which could be several years). These materials (known as [oxo, oxy or oxobio] degradable are suitable inputs into composting systems. These are also generally not compatible with recycling with other materials and wider environmental impacts are uncertain.  <b>NOTE:</b> If relevant, compostable materials are only to be used where facilities are widely available to enable the items to be composted or specific arrangements have been put in place. Compostable materials may be ‘industrially’ compostable (i.e. EN 13432 certified) or ‘home’ compostable (i.e. OK Compost HOME). ‘Industrially’ compostable are unlikely to compost in a domestic environment and may not compost in an industrial facility – this will need to be confirmed.	

Recommended Criteria		Additional Guidance	RFP Question Reference
 	Supply of equipment and other materials on a rental/hire or supply of equipment that is pre-used or second-hand is encouraged where appropriate and feasible.	Performance based guarantees or warranties are expected.	IV. Sports Equipment: Question 9
 	Use of reused or recycled content in equipment, components and other materials is encouraged.	Sources must be post-consumer in origin and be independently verified by a qualified third party or through a recognised scheme. The only exception to this is where technical constraints limit the % content or a lower level is considered to be above the marketplace norms.	I. Standard Questionnaire: Question 35

**NOTE:** Although focused on single-use plastics, suppliers should ideally be publicly supportive of the goals of the Global Plastics Pact (or one of its official national networks). It should be noted that as part of its Sustainability Essentials Series, the IOC has developed the ‘Plastic Game Plan for Sport’ which aims to help sports organisations eliminate single-use plastic items, reduce the amount of plastic used in general and recycle as much as possible.