

# Apple's EPEAT Tribulations Highlight the Importance of Certifications

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On June 29, 2012, Apple Inc. notified Electronic Product Environmental Assessment Tool (EPEAT) that it was withdrawing its products from the EPEAT registry and would no longer be submitting its products to EPEAT for environmental rating. Reportedly, Apple withdrew its products from the EPEAT registry because "their design direction was no longer consistent with the EPEAT requirements."<sup>1</sup>

The EPEAT registry is a directory of computer, monitor, and laptop products that have been certified against a variety of environmental criteria, such as design for end-of-life, energy conservation, and product packaging. EPEAT certification indicates that a product is recyclable and manufactured in an environmentally friendly manner. Many governments, educational institutions, and private companies require or encourage the purchase of EPEAT-registered products. For example, federal agencies are required by Executive Order 13423 to meet at least 95 percent of their requirements for an electronic product with an EPEAT-registered product, unless there is no EPEAT standard for such product.

Apple's decision to remove its products from the EPEAT registry was slammed by environmental groups and customers. In a much-publicized move, San Francisco city officials said they would block the purchase of Apple desktops and laptops by all municipal agencies because of the company's decision.<sup>2</sup> (A mayoral Executive Directive from 2008 mandates that city departments purchase EPEAT-certified desktops, laptops, and monitors.) At least two universities also said they would review their Apple purchases in light of Apple's withdrawal from EPEAT.<sup>3</sup>

Apple initially defended its decision to drop out of EPEAT, but the company rejoined the green product registry a few days after San Francisco said it would block purchases of Apple products.

The backlash against Apple's withdrawal from EPEAT is instructive for product manufacturers for two reasons. First, it teaches that governments and institutions are serious about certifications—they are not willing to compromise, even for beloved brands with solid environmental credentials. Second, the ordeal shows that certification decisions can damage a manufacturer's goodwill with individual consumers—who typically do not care about the certifying body—in ways that manufacturers may not have realized until now. For while most consumers do not seek out EPEAT-registered products, it seems clear that they notice when their city or *alma mater* dumps a product that is not registered and that such an action diminishes their impression of the

manufacturer.

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1 See Joel Schectman, *Apple Removes Green Electronics Certification From Products*, WALL ST. J., July 6, 2012 (posting to CIO Report blog), *available* here.

2 See Adam Satariano, *Apple Quitting Green Registry Leads to Purchasing Fallout*, BLOOMBERG BUSINESSWEEK, July 11, 2012.

3 See *id.*