

Wallcovering Association: Tech Committee 2005 Environmental Issues Status Report December 30, 2005

USGBC & Green Building

The draft report by USGBC's PVC Task Group was issued one year ago. The USGBC's Technical and Scientific Advisory Committee (TSAC) has been reporting for months that it would be releasing the final report soon. It was widely considered that this meant it would be released in late December as they had done for the draft report. As the year ends, however, the issues created by the USGBC regarding PVC use in green buildings remains an open question.

Also of concern are changes occurring within the USGBC leadership. Nigel Howard has quit his post as chief technology officer and was a key member of the PVC task group. He led the project to incorporate life cycle assessment (LCA) criteria into the next version of LEED. LCA was a critical tool used in development of the PVC task group draft report. His e-mails expressed concern that he had been unable to raise the \$200,000 necessary to continue the LCA effort. This raises important questions on what his departure means to finalization of the report and whether USGBC will keep the draft report essentially intact.

The current USGBC position on the draft report is that it was issued to receive input, AND WAS NOT A FINAL DOCUMENT. The PVC Task Group has been, we are told, working to finalize its report. Information from stakeholders can be viewed at <http://tsac-pvc.obiki.org>. The key elements still of concern were identified on August 25:

1. The draft report is damaging to LEED's leadership position and to the momentum behind market transformation
2. The validity and wisdom of using this "new" method combining LCA and risk assessment was questioned.
3. "Data gap" issues: The draft report included issues that could not be integrated into LCA/risk assessment analysis for lack of data.
4. The report did not address the role of the Stockholm convention on POPs, and PBTs.
5. The disposal phase issues of recyclability and the end-of-life fates of PVC were not addressed.
6. Fence line exposures and risks to people living near manufacturing facilities issues were not resolved.
7. The role of fires in the life cycles of building materials was not resolved.
8. Assumptions about compounds used in vinyl, and the lifetime of alternative building materials were thought to need expanding.

Their initial report stated that the available evidence does not support a conclusion that PVC is consistently worse than alternative materials. The Task Group concluded that a

credit in the LEED system for eliminating PVC, or any particular material is not supportable. The report goes further to state that a credit of this type could steer designers to use materials which perform worse over their life cycles. The draft report recommended developing issue-based credits using both LCA and risk assessment. This initiative is showing warning signs that it may be in jeopardy. Resolution of PVC use in buildings as a result of the USGBC's task group efforts is less clear now than one year ago.

Green Guidelines for Healthcare and schools – These issues are leading the green building market initiatives because of the health protection issues associated with each one. It is expected that these building markets will be most affected by green building standards implementation. WA members can expect more inquiries regarding “green” environmental acceptability of products in these areas.

Other USGBC Activity of Interest

USGBC Files for ANSI Accreditation - The USGBC has filed an application with the American National Standards Institute (ANSI) to become an ANSI-accredited national standards developer for standards related to green-building practices. In tandem with its ANSI filing, USGBC also announced an amendment to its bylaws to expand USGBC's membership to include trade and professional associations.

Both of these initiatives indicate that they are marginally moving toward a more mainstream position for the organization, but this will be confirmed only if they allow a broader group to participate in the development of their certification programs. WA is attempting to get a seat at the table to participate in the ANSI process.

USGBC Chapter groups are now initiating advocacy campaigns at State and Local levels to support use of LEED certification strategies. Alternatively, our efforts to keep other green building organizations neutral in 2005 have been successful. As a participating Board of Directors member for the Virginia Sustainable Building Network, we have provided another voice to the green building community requesting that education, not advocacy be used for determining material considerations for green building use.

Programs with the potential to affect WA Members

PROP 65 - The Office of Environmental Health Hazard Assessment (OEHHA) of the California EPA added butyl benzyl phthalate (BBP), di-n-butyl phthalate (DBP), and di-n-hexyl phthalate (DnHP) to their list of chemicals known to the state to cause reproductive toxicity. The listing of the three phthalates was effective December 2, 2005. WA members will need to continue to monitor California Prop

65 activities to determine their company's reporting requirements under this regulation.

This continues OEHHA's overall mission to protect and enhance public health and the environment by scientific evaluation of risks posed by hazardous substances. For a current list of chemicals requiring product labeling, go to the Prop 65 website at: http://www.oehha.ca.gov/prop65/prop65_list/Newlist.html.

DINP TRI Listing - On September 5, 2000, EPA issued a proposed rule to add a diisononyl phthalate (DINP) category to the list of toxic chemicals subject to the reporting requirements under EPCRA section 313 for toxics inventory reporting. It is expected that this will add reporting requirements to WA companies using DINP as part of their product formulations.

2005 WA Initiatives

WA Responds to Media Attacks on Wallcovering

Another WA initiative for 2005 included reviewing bad media press and outright attacks on wallcovering products. Specific investigations and response considerations were prepared for the following:

Chicago's Hilton O'Hare Airport announced rebuilding two rooms with special wood flooring, wall coverings, fabrics, furniture, paints, adhesives and cleaning products to control and remove dusts, molds and chemicals that could trigger reactions in allergic guests.

Parents magazine, July issue "The Hidden Toxins in Your Home", an editorial response was prepared regarding their indiscriminate inclusion of "vinyl wallcoverings" into a list of synthetic products that people should avoid. It was clarified that synthetic materials are combined with natural products to enhance physical characteristics that are important considerations in improving the safety of home environments. Safety is a key reason why vinyl is a part of many wallcovering products.

ASID, NY Metro edition produces a page in their newsletter listing wallcoverings as a "don't" when considering "green" alternatives. The ASID recommendations were made to assist their readership in the selection of "green" products, but did not provide any comprehensive information or discussion of the topic. Selecting "green" products is a complicated process that requires due diligence and a broad understanding of scientific information. The determination of acceptable products needs to consider an approach which uses a variety of analytical tools, principal among them being life cycle assessment and risk assessment.

Sister Association Strategic Plans. Strategies of other associations are being closely monitored. The effectiveness of these initiatives is reviewed to provide insight into alternative methods of communication that WA might consider to defend against attacks and/or misinformation spread about wallcovering products. A number of associations including the Vinyl Institute, The American Chemistry Council's Phthalate esters Panel, Resilient Floor Covering Institute (RFCI), the Carpet and Rug Institute (CRI), and the Chemical Fabrics and Films Association have initiated campaigns to distinguish product quality. Coordination with these programs or new communication initiatives will be a key opportunity to reduce industry damage from advocacy campaigns against wallcovering products.