

Environmentally Speaking



PERFORMING MEANINGFUL EVALUATION OF ENVIRONMENTALLY PREFERRED PRODUCTS

When the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (U.S. EPA) published its guiding principles for Environmentally Preferred Purchasing, it provided a tool to the Federal community designed to enable purchasers to make consistent, informed decisions on environmentally responsible purchasing. The product evaluation process has many variables, however, that must be weighed against one another. There are no universally defined product attribute thresholds that make a product "environmentally preferred".

Because of this, the General Services Administration (GSA) has made every effort to support our Federal customers with the information that they need to make informed purchase decisions. In addition to traditional cost, delivery and performance information, the GSA Environmental Products and Services Guide and on-line GSA *Advantage!* ordering system, delineate key attribute characteristics for commodities with potential environmental impact. Depending on the product, these characteristics include energy efficiency, and volatile organic compound, recovered material, Clean Air Act hazardous air pollutant, Emergency Planning and Community Right to Know Act extremely hazardous substance, ozone depleting substance, heavy metal, and carcinogenic material content. All information can be accessed via the GSA Federal Supply Service web page at www.fss.gsa.gov.

Third-party certification organizations can also help. An example is Green Seal. Green Seal is an independent, non-profit organization dedicated to protecting the environment by promoting the manufacture and sale of environmentally

responsible consumer products. It sets environmental standards and awards a "Green Seal of Approval" to products that cause less harm to the environment than other similar products based on defined criteria. To date, standards have been set for 28 product categories. Green Seal continues to work in cooperation with the private sector and federal agencies like U.S. EPA, the Department of Defense and GSA to expand this list of environmental certification standards.

Finally, products can be directly compared based on manufacturer information. The Federal Trade Commission, in cooperation with U.S. EPA, has developed guidelines for advertisers to ensure that environmental advertising and labeling claims comply with the law and do not mislead the consumer. Guidance can be found in the Federal Trade Commission Regulation, 16th Code of Federal Regulations, Subpart 260 (16 CFR 260).

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GSA RESPONDS TO NEW EPA VOLATILE ORGANICS RULE FOR ARCHITECTURAL COATINGS

On September 11, 1998, the U.S. EPA promulgated the latest in its Clean Air Act rules - the Architectural Coatings Rule for Volatile Organic Compounds (63 FR 48848). This rule limits the amount of volatile organic compounds (VOCs) that manufacturers and importers of architectural coatings can put into their products on or after September 13, 1999. Aerosols and extremely small containers (1 liter or smaller) of paint are exempt as are all paints intended solely for application to non-stationary structures such as airplanes, ships, boats, and railcars.

GSA has responded to these requirements by consulting with manufacturers regarding suitable product replacement, and by modifying or eliminating non-compliant Federal Specifications and Commercial Item Descriptions. In addition, GSA has compiled a cross-reference referral for identifying suitable low-VOC replacements for high-VOC paints.

This reference can be accessed on the Federal Supply Service Hardware and Appliance Center Environmental Services webpage at: www.r6.gsa.gov/hac/envirnmnt.htm

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