Green Coatings: Better is Now

High-quality green coating products represent a business opportunity that is here now. The National Association of Home Builders projects the green market will grow 400% by 2010.

For communities and homeowners, energy efficiency and family health are the key drivers, the latter of which concerns what's covering the walls. As reported by the EPA, the quality of air indoors is often three to five times more toxic than the air outside and is a major environmental health priority.

by Jay Tompt
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News of soaring asthma rates and other health issues affecting our children are now commonplace, so it's not surprising that concerns about toxic chemicals have become one of the most important criteria for new home buyers and do-it-yourselfers.

The biggest question for most of these folks isn't "What are the greener alternatives?," since many are already aware of the products. Now they wonder "Where can I find them?" Retailers such as Virgil's Hardware and Jill's Paint, both in Los Angeles, and Friedman's Home Improvement and Fairfax Lumber in Northern California, are serving this rising demand with a variety of products, including Green Seal-certified, zero-VOC latex paints, soy-based sealers, clay plasters and natural stains. And their customers are supporting them—sales are up. Fairfax Lumber, for example, is doing so well with its green product lines it was voted Independent Pro Dealer of the year.

RIght: A Virgil's staffer at home among the many green paint & hardware products.

Is a Green Carrot Tasty?

While the growing green building movement offers an enticing "carrot," the specter of regulation provides the "stick." The VOC regulations in Southern California were recently made more stringent and many traditional suppliers were forced to take back their non-compliant products. That left a bad taste in everyone's mouth, especially dealers. But as a result, smaller, innovative manufacturers are getting the shelf space once denied them.

When people think of greener choices for wall coverings, the first product category that comes up is low-VOC latex paint. Some manufacturers already have a big head start. Rodda Paint, for example, has been making Horizon zero-VOC latex paint for years. It's certified by Green Seal, a trusted standard that prohibits common toxic paint ingredients, requires low-VOC emissions, and ensures quality with stringent performance testing.

On the other hand, because traditional wood stains rely so heavily on petroleum-derived ingredients, people are often unaware that non-toxic stains even exist. One popular natural stain on the market comes from German manufacturer Auro. It won Germany's most prestigious quality award in an open competition against the best conventional stains on the market. What makes Auro different is that it's made mostly from plants, is non-toxic and it costs no more than premium conventional stains.

There are many other high-quality products on the market that are non-toxic, price competitive and easy to use. American Clay, for example, is a non-toxic clay plaster with quality as good as imported lime plasters and for less cost. SoyGuard is a soy-based non-toxic wood sealer for decks—it's a penetrating sealer that's as good as they get.

The market opportunity for supplying green products is opening right now. The products perform as well without the negative health effects. So, where can you find them? Almost all distributors, including Plan-It Hardware in California, are stocking these products and more.

For more information about Plan-It Hardware and its line of sustainable home improvement products visit planithardware.com. TPD

The opinions expressed are those of the writer, and are not to be construed as product endorsements by The Paint Dealer.

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