

Certified products keep indoors healthy

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Photo source: [SABMag](#)

Chemicals are absorbed into our bodies in three ways: inhalation, through the skin and ingestion. With indoor air two to five times more polluted than outdoor air, and with people spending 90% of their time indoors, Lung Associations, the World Health Organization and Environmental Agencies view indoor air pollution as one of the greatest risks to human health.

Tighter homes

The quality of air inside our homes was not a concern before higher standards of air-tightness became the norm. Around the same time, solid wood trim, cupboards, doors and shelving were replaced by composites held

together with chemical binders that affected indoor air quality in tighter homes. Moreover, condensation and mould began appearing on windows since homes were no longer breathing naturally. The humidity problem was solved with HRVs – Heat Recovery Ventilators - which replaced humid air with outside air and eliminated minor health concerns for many. However, many hypersensitive individuals have continued to find it impossible to live in a conventional home because of indoor pollutants. Through self-diagnoses by those affected, the source of the problem was linked directly to poor indoor air quality. As a result, education efforts within the construction industry began in 2004, partly initiated through LEED [Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design], emphasizing the importance of lowering the emissions from materials and providing enhanced ventilation strategies.

A listing of products that can contribute to better indoor air quality can be found at www.sabmagazine.com/LEED-NC , then click on Indoor Environmental Quality and scroll to Low-Emitting Materials.

Preserving indoor air quality

Once a home is built with healthier materials and improved ventilation, it is important to maintain a healthy indoor environment. This means purchasing and using products that will not tax our immune systems and cause children to develop allergies or exacerbate existing health conditions in adults. The objective is simple, avoid harmful chemicals in all cleaning products – but finding these products is not always simple. Attempting to unravel the mystery of which chemicals to avoid is a daunting task. Creating products from scratch takes time, even though this is most effective. It is not always a good idea to place trust in statements and symbols developed by manufacturers suggesting that their product is in harmony with nature because the bottle is recyclable, or that the contents will biodegrade, or that it has some unspecified third-party endorsement. There are federal guidelines for environmental labelling, but they are not passed in to law yet. Fortunately, there are recognized third-party certifiers who permit products to carry their logos, providing they meet specific criteria. Each organization has its own perspective, placing a different emphasis on environmental impact, product life cycle and health impacts.

Third-Party Certification



The umbrella organization to which all third-party labelling groups around the world belong is the Global EcoLabelling

Network [GEN], a non-profit association that fosters exchange of information and sets criteria for testing to improve the reliability of labelling.

Canadian manufacturers rely on the recognition of EcoLogo managed by TerraChoice in Ottawa. They base assessments on low VOCs – Volatile Organic Compounds - and will soon set new standards for Asthmagens. It was as recently as 2009 that they began testing residential products, which may explain why third-party certified goods have not yet replaced the self-proclaimed alternatives, even though there are now over 100 distributors of certified residential cleaning solutions. Certification of products from overseas can be checked at the GEN web site: www.globalecolabelling.net/members_associates/map/index.htm

A full list can be found on the EcoLogo web site at: www.environmentalchoice.com/en/greenproducts/consumers/



We will soon find Green Seal on products from the US as they are working with manufacturers to help design a line of environmentally-preferable products. Their interest is primarily environmental and not directly human health.



When you see the Design for the Environment [DfE] logo on a product it means that the DfE scientific review team has screened each ingredient for potential human health and environmental effects and that, based on available information, the US Environmental Protection Agency [EPA] expert judgment deems the product to contain only those ingredients that pose the least concern among chemicals in their class.



The GREENGUARD Indoor Air Quality Certification Program gives assurance that products designed for use indoors meet strict chemical emissions limits, which contribute to the creation of healthier interiors. Achieving GREENGUARD certification gives credence to manufacturers' sustainability claims, backing them with empirical scientific data from an unbiased, third-party organization.

One can easily and unintentionally support the green washing trend. Labels are designed to satisfy our desire to make good choices quickly, and it's human nature to associate positive product claims with good intent. Seeing a trusted third-party certification logo gives the assurance that we have made a healthy buying decision.