

# How to Go GREEN

## Toy industry recognizing, responding to sustainability issues

By Stevanne Auerbach

The world we live in is going through dramatic ecological and environmental changes. The toy industry is growing more aware of the issues and is becoming more responsive to the changes in a wide variety of ways. There are new operational safety standards, more eco-friendly practices being employed by companies and retail outlets, and more innovative green products being produced and sold. Those in the toy industry are also taking new green principles and practices back home, into schools, and reaching out to others. Some changes are small, but each change makes a contribution to reduce the carbon footprint and helps to make our homes, work sites, and products safer and less toxic.

### How to Go Green

Many toy companies and retailers are already making great strides, tracking materials used in their products, reducing waste and energy used in their manufacturing processes, and ensuring their products are packaged in recycled materials. These are terrific steps. Company executives can also take steps to better assess their environmental practices and to assure their supply chain involves only environmentally certified sources. They can also affirm that suppliers provide valid information about additives used in manufacturing and the conditions under which they are made are environmentally safe and more socially responsible.

How can companies and individuals move to inspire children to appreciate the environment and help them to take better care of our natural resources? We might start by showing by example what we adults do to conserve energy. We can show them how we take better care of our homes and offices and illustrate how we reduce our carbon footprint in a variety of ways. We can look more closely at what we do every day — use paper or cloth bags instead of plastic, conserve energy, recycle, and take some time each day to be in nature, out of doors, walking, growing vegetables and in other ways appreciating the fragile balance of nature.

We can also consider what we give children to play with. We can examine the products that are produced for play. We can find out more precisely about the materials and the process used to make them. We have some excellent examples of playthings that are made safely, are healthy to use, and have plenty of special values in their message.

While green products constitute a small number among all the choices of products available, we need to start somewhere. The awareness grows as more families are thinking and considering new directions that

are safer, more balanced and healthier. More families participate in Earth Day Celebrations around the world as more parents and teachers become better informed about the deleterious issues affecting our planet.

Awareness is spreading and that in itself is encouraging. Each step helps, and moves us toward a healthier home, community, work place and environment.

Laurie Hyman, one of the founders of the Green Toy Inc, says: "Parents want to feel good about the products they give their kids. Toys have always been judged by their play value, but now they are also being judged by the 'ingredients' they are made from. Parents want toys that are made from safer, greener materials that are both good for their kids and good for the earth.

"Everything we do at Green Toys Inc., from recycling through manufacturing, assembly and warehousing, is in California, 99 percent in the Bay Area," Hyman said. "This concept of 'reverse globalization,' keeps the supply chain local, keeps jobs here in the U.S., and helps reduce our carbon footprint. In addition, our choice in materials for our products and packaging helps save energy and reduce greenhouse gas emissions."

### Green Products

We have identified products that help children learn more about their world. We have found products made from organic materials or produced in ways that are healthier. Hopefully those who understand their intrinsic value will want to locate these products and make them available for stores, schools and homes. You will find a roster of books and websites at the end of the article that may inspire you to learn more about what you can do to participate in working to create a healthier place for everyone to live.

### Green Toys Recycling Truck

Sort bottles, cans, and paper or just have a blast. Eco-conscious kids will learn recycling basics while playing with this super cool recycling truck that has a movable recycling bed and open/rear door. The eco-friendly design has no metal axles. The Green Toys Inc. Recycling Truck is made in the U.S. from 100% recycled plastic milk containers that save energy and help reduce greenhouse gas emissions, all in the name of good green fun. Product is for children 3 to 9 years old. Price is \$24.99.

### Hugg-A-Planet Foundlings

The Foundlings line is the original organic cotton plush toy line that was introduced when green was just a color and long before it was a movement. Made in the

U.S., the line includes Bunny, Bear, Rabbit, Elephant, Pappi, Lab, Turtle and Whale. Combines a 100% organic (no pesticides) cotton shell with a fill of unbleached cotton clippings. The embroidered eyes are created for safety. This is one of the most environmentally safe toys made in the world today. It takes three years of chem-



ical- and pesticide-free farming to certify a cotton crop as organic. Organic farming protects ground water and the farm workers. The cotton used in Foundlings is free from pesticides and other harmful chemicals. The product is hand-made in Vermont. All the soft animals are machine washable and safe. Product is for children 1 to 3 years old. Retail prices range from \$15.95 for Bunny to \$29.95 for Elephant.

### Maple Landmark Woodcraft Maple Teether Pair

A unique and traditional wooden teether that is safe, sturdy and perfect for baby. This is natural and unfinished wood that is the right choice to overcome concerns about toxic finishes. Sold in a pair, these maple teethers measure about 3.5" in diameter. The lumber for the teethers is harvested locally by lumbermen who have been in the wood business for more than 150 years. The Lathrop family harvest lumber from family forests. The Lathrops believe in working with the Vermont Family Forest Assn. and other forestry groups to protect, stimulate and cultivate natural resources. Retail price is \$15.50 a pair.



## Blue Orange Games Gobblet Gobblers

Based upon the all-time favorite, this is a fun strategy game that will keep the family hungry to play for hours. Pick your Gobblers and line up three of them in a row to win the game. The Gobblers have a strong appetite and can gobble up smaller Gobblers. These cute little characters test strategy and stimulate memory. The pieces have a bright and colorful all-wooden design. Easy to learn, it is a quick thinking game that is fun to play. Designed for two players ages 5 and up. Play time: 2 to 5 minutes. Retail price is \$19.99.



## Go Green Activities

Think sustainability and longevity. Toys should not be used once and thrown away. A good toy that is well designed, durable and fun will last forever and be passed on to the next generation. Value in this case is tremendous. One toy company president reminded us that when he grew up, he played with wooden toys his grandfather built and today they are passed to his great-grand-children. Not only do they produce no waste, but also carry sentimental value through time.

Other ways your company can provide local support for green activities include:

- Support the local Toy Library where you live. <http://www.usatla.org/Welcome.html>
- Work with schools to help them more green. [www.ase.org/section/program/greensh](http://www.ase.org/section/program/greensh)
- Change the types of light bulbs you use at home and at work.
- Walk, bike or car pool instead of driving alone whenever possible.
- Read more to find out how others are improving work place and home.

See additional resources at the end of the article.

## Green Companies Commitment

When we launched the Dr. Toy's Best Green Products Award Program, we wanted to recognize innovation in green products that were making a difference, being made using new processes, and/or based on principles such as planting new trees for those that were being used to produce their products. Green awareness has grown throughout the toy industry because of many factors—consumer demand, product safety issues, wider realization of the precariousness of our

planet and a broadening of green principles that reflect daily practice. We applaud each change.

We are pleased and proud to identify the best Green Products and all of the conscientious companies that are making these products. We looked at many qualified companies. They each are making a difference and making many important contributions both in product development and eco-friendly practices. Even if the practices are not extensive, these are companies that have been either leaders in this area or are now participating in the growing number pledged to move ahead and continue to make a difference.

We hope the summary of these principles reflected by the growing group of green companies will continue to inspire others to match the effort. Toy companies and toy stores share the commitment to help preserve the world we live in. They are leading providers of new products, expanding awareness, and inspiring others. Green products reflect these goals. More companies are practicing green principles in their daily operations, providing support to local and national organizations that are making a difference, and providing information and resources to consumers.

As one company said, "Going 100% green won't happen overnight, but moving in a new green direction is the best place to start!"

We urge you to review both product details and why the company is considered a leader in promoting green practices.

This was challenging as each company in the green company roster is sincerely practicing the principles by producing high-quality products and have already made large differences. We hope the activities of these companies will be reviewed and replicated by others who want to benefit from the important changes being made in expanding green practices.

Some of the companies actually manufacture eco-friendly products that reduce the carbon footprint through carefully thought out manufacturing processes. Their products reflect commitment and consumers have had enthusiastic responses.

Some of the practices already in place among green companies include using:

- Recycled paper and other eco-friendly materials in minimum quantities in the packaging.
- Recycled materials in the manufacturing process.
- Polyth, a synthetic "tree-free" paper made of 100% polypropylene, one of the most eco-friendly alternatives to vinyl. This rugged synthetic paper is water-proof and can be wiped clean with a damp cloth.
- Organic products that are chemical-free.
- Natural dyes.
- Glues and other materials that are non-toxic.
- New processes for plastic-based products.
- Both sides of paper.
- Factories that are Fair Trade certified.
- Manual methods to assemble products.
- Local facilities for manufacturing.

## Green Company Practices

Following is a list of some of the actions that companies already practicing green principles in their workplaces and factories have taken:

- Install energy-saving lighting fixtures throughout office and plant.
- Save electrical energy by turning off lights.

- Reprogram computers and other electrical equipment to shut down automatically when not in use.
  - Install solutubes, which allow for natural light to illuminate key workstations.
  - Eliminate the emission of any Volatile Organic Compounds (VOC) into the atmosphere.
  - Use recycling procedures in which all employees participate. This could include recycling cans, bottles, paper, cardboard, cell phones, electronics, electronic media, landscape waste, and construction debris. (One company recycled 2,170 tons of material, saving 37,000 trees in the process.)
  - Minimize driving alone during work hours by using environmentally friendly options such as teleconferencing, video-conference, carpools, and public transit.
  - Reduce use of paper through electronic billing and management.
  - Express the company's environmental messages via press releases and advertising.
  - Promote consumer awareness by supporting and promoting public participation in Green practices in homes and schools.
  - Replant trees.
  - Inspire special programs and services and contribute to the preservation of the planet.
  - Minimize or eliminate unnecessary packaging. For example, Blue Orange Games' packaging is designed to be used as a playing board or a place where you can store game pieces.
  - Write quick rules directly on the packaging so even if paper instructions are lost, the child can still remember how to play the game.
  - Be proactive on a small scale at the company level. At the office, stop using plastic bottles or cups. Purchase aluminum water bottles for each employee.
  - Recycle printed paper and reuse or shred for packing material.
  - Replace paper towels with fabric towels.
  - Turn off half of the warehouse lights.
  - Compost all food products.
- In summary, the three best suggested activities retailers and companies can do to be greener:
- Visually make changes — light bulbs are simplest — and offer to recycle packaging, as it shows a commitment to the general public.
  - Be honest about being green. Consumers are very aware of what feels right to them about green.
  - Educate or make available green information to customers and train employees to really hear what the customer wants.

## Recognizing Green Companies

We began recognizing green companies and practices in 2007 with the first Dr. Toy Best Green Company Award presented to Blue Orange Games. We recognized the company as the first to launch a campaign to better the environment by making a promise to its customers and a commitment to society by re-planting two trees for every one used in creating its games.

Company founders Julien Mayot and Thierry Denoual use high-quality, kid-safe materials, plus they recognize the future in their business practices today. This recognition considers how the company uses a sustainable way to provide an important component to all their wooden games, blocks and puzzles. Plant trees where you cut them is the essence of their tree campaign, and Blue Orange has planted more than 50,000 trees since 2007.

Blue Orange Games is in the process of being certi-

ified as a San Francisco Green Business by <http://www.sfgreenbusiness.org>. Check with your local green business organization to find out how to make similar commitments.

In 2008, we recognized Green Toys Inc. for launching a campaign to better the environment by making a promise to its customers and a commitment to society to use recycled plastics to make new products. Robert von Goeben and Laurie Hyman, co-founders of Green Toys Inc., were acknowledged for their creative use of recycled, kid-safe materials and in adopting business practices that keep manufacturing local to California, which saves in carbon emissions and creates more U.S. jobs. The company uses a sustainable approach in its material selection, packaging and business philosophy, which results in high quality, fun toys.

Green Toys Inc. creates and manufactures safe, environmentally and socially responsible toys and offers consumers a trusted source. Products are made in the U.S. from 100% recycled plastic milk containers that save energy and reduce greenhouse gas emissions and are safe for children. Green Toys Inc. products have been embraced by retailers and consumers who appreciate their innovative and colorful designs. For more information, visit: [www.greentoys.com](http://www.greentoys.com).

In 2009, the Hugg-A-Planet Co. was recognized for its long time commitment and innovative products. We have known the company since it started and always admired its products and principles. The Foundlings Line is the original organic cotton plush toy collection. The products are all made in the U.S. from 100% organic material (no pesticides).

We will announce the winners for 2010 on August 1st.

### Green Standards and Certifications

"Greener standards and certifications like EcoLogo will help identify the real environmental leaders in the toy industry and should increase their market share over time," said Scot Case, vice president of Terra-

Choice, managers of the EcoLogo Program. "Environmental standards will help shape the design and development of toys that are more environmentally and socially responsible by making it easier for parents, grandparents and family friends to buy greener products."

In 2009, the EcoLogo Program, one of North America's oldest and most respected multi-attribute environmental standards and certification marks, announced that it would establish the first comprehensive environmental toy standard for use in the U.S. and Canada.

Dr. Angela Griffiths, executive director of the EcoLogo program, says the standard addresses a gap in the toy industry. "Children's toys became a priority for the EcoLogo Program when our research demonstrated that there are no common criteria for environmentally sound toys and children's products in North America," she said.



The Seven Sins of Greenwashing Study conducted by TerraChoice Environmental Marketing in 2009 shows toys and baby products were found to attract an above-average frequency of environmental claims. It is for this reason that these products are at a higher risk of greenwashing (the act of misleading consumers regarding the environmental practices of a company or the environmental benefits of a product or service). Alphabet blocks claiming to be "natural", cotton toys purporting to be "certified non-toxic" and "biodegradable building blocks" were all found in the study and can be considered vague and misleading if not supported by meaningful information or proof. Marketers and manufacturers should provide honest and accurate environmental claims on their toys and baby products to ensure they are not greenwashing.

The EcoLogo Toy Standard will identify environmental leadership in this product category and is also intended to encourage the design and development of toy products that are produced in a way that is more environmentally and socially responsible.

In April 2010, EcoLogo released the first draft of the Toy Standard, which includes criteria for play products made from wood, plastic, rubber, textiles, metals and bio-based materials. The current draft excludes products made with added fragrances; anti-bacterial or antimicrobial agents; heavy metals such as lead, cadmium or mercury; and substances or components that are known carcinogens, mutagens or reproductive toxins.

EcoLogo standards are developed in an open, public, transparent process, and there are numerous opportunities to be involved. The typical standard development process lasts 12 to 18 months. Anyone may participate in the process, including parents and grandparents, toy manufacturers, retailers, government agencies and non-profit advocacy groups. Currently, more than 150 stakeholders have signed up to participate.

The EcoLogo Toy Standard development process is being managed on behalf of the EcoLogo Program by Catherine Wilt and the staff at the University of Tennessee's Center for Clean Products, leaders in the development of environmental product and material standards, and is supported by Dr. Sally Edwards, director of the Sustainable Children's Products Initiative at the Lowell Center for Sustainable Production, University of Massachusetts, Lowell.

The Toy Standard is also being developed with the assistance of a diverse and well-qualified Advisory Committee. The members of the Advisory Committee represent the toy industry, environmental non-governmental organizations, retailers, and general users. A full list of the project team and advisory committee members can be found at: <http://www.ecologo.org/common/assets/EcoLogo%20Project%20Team%20and%20AC%20Bios%20Jan%2019%202010.pdf>.

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## eco-friendly

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As the EcoLogo Toy Standard is still in the development stage, companies and manufacturers looking to fit their toy products to this standard should continue to stay up-to-date on its progress.

In the meantime, companies can begin to document "greener" activities implemented such as tracking and cataloging materials used, waste and energy reduction and incorporation of recycled packaging.

Interested companies should also become active in EcoLogo's Toy Standard development process, which will allow them to be better prepared to strategically address criteria likely to be included in the final standard. Once the Toy Standard is finalized, any manufacturer that demonstrates compliance with the standard is eligible to apply for EcoLogo certification.

The first draft of the Toy Standard, as well as all other public information about the standard development process, can be found on the EcoLogo website.

To receive updates and notifications on the development of the EcoLogo Toy Standard, contact Katherine Stewart at the EcoLogo Program: [kstewart@ecologo.org](mailto:kstewart@ecologo.org), (800) 478-0309 ext. 231.

Comments have been received from a variety of perspectives on the EcoLogo standards and readers are encouraged to review and respond.

Barbara Rainville of Maple Landmark Toys reviewed the EcoLogo standards and said, "Tiered standards are important because it does give manufacturers a place to start. If the certification is important to the manufacturer, it will encourage, promote, or otherwise outline ways to effect positive change going forward. Since manufacturers are spread across the globe, certain standards may not be able to be achieved. This does not mean a product is not worthy of certification at all, just maybe not on the highest tier."

Rachel Murray Meyer, toy safety and quality expert, said, "Toy companies that take the lead in using resources efficiently will be at a competitive advantage, both economically and by being in a more favorable position with both retail customers and consumers."

### More Green Resources

## Eco Pubs & Sites

- The Earthworks Group, *The New 50 Simple Things Kids Can Do to Save the Earth*, [www.50simplekids.com](http://www.50simplekids.com)
- Joanna Yarow, *1001 Ways to Save the Earth*, [www.chroniclebooks.com](http://www.chroniclebooks.com)
- Kim McKay and Jenny Bonnin, *True Green Kids-100 things you can do to save the planet*, National Geographic, [www.betruegreen.com](http://www.betruegreen.com)

### Green Websites:

- [www.greenamericatoday.org](http://www.greenamericatoday.org)
- [www.globalgreen.org](http://www.globalgreen.org)
- [www.greenmatters.com](http://www.greenmatters.com)
- [www.worldwatch.org](http://www.worldwatch.org)
- [www.foe.org](http://www.foe.org)
- [www.theecologist.org](http://www.theecologist.org)
- [www.eartheducation.org](http://www.eartheducation.org)
- [www.thegreenguide.com](http://www.thegreenguide.com)
- [www.kidplanet.org](http://www.kidplanet.org)
- [www.epa.gov/kids](http://www.epa.gov/kids)
- [www.droptheplasticbag.org](http://www.droptheplasticbag.org)
- [www.planetpatrol.info](http://www.planetpatrol.info)
- [www.earth911.org/for-students](http://www.earth911.org/for-students)
- [www.healthychild.org](http://www.healthychild.org)

Going green does require a change in attitude and perspective, but by taking small steps to modify what has been practiced in the past we can make a make our homes, communities, schools, work sites, industry and the world safer and less toxic in the long run. At the very least, we can make a start. ■

*Stevanne Auerbach, PhD, aka Dr. Toy, is a longtime play and toy specialist who evaluates products on [www.drtoy.com](http://www.drtoy.com), is the author of "Smart Play/Smart Toys," and launched the first Best Green Products and Best Green Companies Awards Program in 2007.*

