

GET THE GREEN

CAN PAINTING CONTRACTORS AFFORD NOT TO GO GREEN?

By Karen Gaspers

Several years ago Joel Hamberg, a veteran painting contractor in Portland, Ore., considered passing on a project because the customer wanted their home painted with green product. They feared the off-gassing and harsher chemicals of conventional paints would harm their autistic child. Hamberg wasn't sure he wanted the hassle of finding and working with green paint. In the end Hamberg decided to give it a try. He found the products and completed the job as requested.

That experience opened Hamberg's eyes. He began to observe the regulatory march toward coatings with lower VOCs. He began to think about the environmental impact his company, Joel Hamberg Painting Inc., was having on his community and his 12 employees. He noted the growing demand for green from his customers. In 2005, he made a commitment to take his business green.

Hamberg doesn't consider himself a green fanatic. Rather, he sees his decision as a smart business move as well as a conscientious choice. "It's the way the industry is going," he explained.

It doesn't take much research to realize Hamberg is correct. Simply walk down the aisle at the local paint store and take stock of the number of paint manufacturers with a line of green paint. Sherwin-Williams has its Duration, Builders Solution and Harmony lines. It also developed a proprietary GreenSure designation to signal its eco-friendly paints. Benjamin Moore rolled out its Aura brand in 2007, and in April, Akzo/ICI debuts its FreshAire Choice at The Home Depot.

If that's not convincing enough, track

the number of times clients at least inquire about green product. Architects and consumers are driving this trend. According to one marketing rep for Akzo/ICI Paints, Strongsville, Ohio, the number of commercial construction projects specifying the use of green paint has grown substantially in recent years, and that trend is now spreading to the home building market.

"We will see increased interest and demand from contractors and homeowners for environmentally responsible coatings."

— Steve Revnew, Sherwin-Williams

One reason for this is that "green initiatives and products are being mandated at a local, regional and even national

level," explained Steve Revnew, director of marketing and product development at Sherwin-Williams, Cleveland. This is especially true for corporations and commercial and government facilities, he added.

Other reasons architects and building owners specify green include a desire for green building certification such as LEED, faster return-to-service of crucial areas, even the desire to burnish their reputation as green leaders. On the residential level, consumers are increasingly aware of the environmental impact of the products in their homes and are asking for, even demanding, green products. And consumers have pragmatic issues as well. Many have health concerns such as allergies and high-risk diseases, or even welfare concerns for infants and elderly in the home.



Green paint's lower airborne VOCs allow contractors to work in occupied spaces without negatively affecting indoor air quality. CREDIT: Sherwin-Williams

“We will see increased interest and demand from contractors and homeowners for environmentally responsible coatings,” Revnew said.

FROM PASTE TO PREMIUM

Painting contractors are beginning to come around to the concept, but those who have are still in the minority. When Hamberg gave his first presentation on going green for painting contractors at a national show in 2007, he recalled how a handful of contractors walked out of the session in disgust.

Ten years ago, that attitude might have been justified. “Green paints were weird to work with, sometimes like putting paste on the wall,” Hamberg said. The problem was compounded by contractors who didn’t take the time to educate themselves about the product. “People didn’t know they had to use different brushes, rollers, even new ways of application,” Hamberg said. So contractors bought green paint and applied it using old techniques. They came away thinking the paint wasn’t any good.

“There is a learning curve with these new coatings, simply because their application properties are different from conventional coatings.”

— Carl Minchew, Benjamin Moore

Today green paints are among the premium, highest-grade materials available. The latest generation of green paint has “better flow and leveling, higher hide and the washability of premium products,” Revnew confirmed. That translates into fewer coats, as well as minimal repaints and costly call-backs. In addition to its better-known qualities – low VOCs and low odor, which improve indoor air quality – Revnew noted that environmentally responsible coatings also contain antimicrobial properties to resist the formulation of mildew on the paint film.

Because they are premium paints,

they do carry a premium price. But that doesn’t necessarily mean higher cost for the contractor. For one thing, green product can increase the market value of projects for contractors, Revnew said. They also can earn third-party validation for achievements.

Hamberg said green paint is less costly for him in the long run because he doesn’t have to mess with the disposal of

solvents, there are fewer safety and compliance issues to worry about, and there is less downtime of employees due to health problems. And in the short term, he added, consumers will pay for it. Hamberg has noticed an increase in requests for bids and jobs since going green. “Clients will seek you out,” he said.

continued on page 26

NO MOLD
ASTM D3273

Rapid Set

ONEPASS[®]

Drywall Repair Material & Joint Compound

- Apply Full Thickness One Pass 0 to 1/2" Thick
- Indoor/Outdoor, Durable in Wet Locations
- Easy to Sand

9-lb boxes and 25-lb bags

Reduces Downtime, Apply and Paint in 2-Hours!

Mold Resistance Rating of 10*
*Highest Possible Rating – ASTM D3273

Available At: Fine Paint Stores and Other Quality Dealers
800-929-3030

Visit us on the web at
www.rapidset.com/onepass.asp

Circle 13 on reader service card or go to www.paintmag.com



Painters from Gerrett Painting, NYC, demonstrated Benjamin Moore's Aura line at its launch in the metro New York area last April. CREDIT: Benjamin Moore

FOLLOW THE CURVE

Green paints do require some adjustments, however. "There is a learning curve with these new coatings, simply because their application properties are different from conventional coatings," said Carl Minchew, director of product development at Benjamin Moore, Montvale, N.J. For example, green paints contain more solids, which cause them to dry faster. Contractors need to take such differences into consideration for each project. But once they do, "the faster dry and recoat times allow them to become more efficient," Minchew said.

Revnew pointed out that the lower air-borne VOCs also allow contractors to work in occupied spaces, such as buildings with around-the-clock shifts, without negatively affecting indoor air quality. That too can reduce job time.

Minchew suggested contractors continue educating themselves about green products, and most importantly, "test drive" the paint. "You don't have to be an early adopter, but you don't want to be the last either," he said. Try the paint in the shop first to get a feel for how to use it on the job. He also suggested contractors

"stick with trusted brands, but be willing to experiment with new products. There are many new products debuting, and this will continue for the next few years."

In the end, the savvy contractor will recognize this trend as an opportunity to expand his or her business, an Akzo/ICI marketing rep said. "Contractors should take stock of the opportunities presented by products which address increasing customer curiosity in the environmental arena," he said.

It's also an opportunity for contractors to differentiate themselves to customers as a business able to assist them in improving their indoor environments. In fact, how contractors conduct their business may be more important even than the paint they use. "We are finding that our owner and architectural specification customers are increasingly appreciative of that side of the story," the Akzo/ICI rep explained. In other words, customers want to work with companies that not only use green paint, but embrace green practices. If they don't, contractors may begin to feel it in the pocketbook.

"If you choose to ignore it, you will be left out and uneducated when opportunity knocks on your door," Hamberg warned.

APC

Karen Gaspers is the editor of American Painting Contractor. She can be reached at kgaspers@douglaspublications.com.

Evolution: From Latex to Green

Green paint actually has its roots in the more familiar latex. "It would not be a stretch to say that the advent of latex paints was the beginning of green paints," said Carl Minchew, director of product development at Benjamin Moore. After all, by replacing many of the solvents found in conventional oil paint with water, manufacturers effectively reduced the VOCs in latex. Green paint simply builds on that technology.

Today, green paints that meet Green Seal's GS-11 standards have 20-30 percent of the VOCs of traditional paint, said Steve Revnew, director of marketing and product development at Sherwin-Williams.

And what drove the industry toward latex paint years ago are some of the same reasons why we now see a rise in green paint's popularity, Revnew added. That includes regulations and requirements, and customer demand.

Consider green paints the next logical, evolutionary step in paint options. "We are discovering ways to eliminate the last bit of VOC without compromising performance," Minchew said.