

PRESS RELEASE

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PAINTERS GO GREEN

GreenPainters program aims to ‘paint Australia green’

Consumers are being urged to consider the environmental impacts of the paints they use. This month sees consumers, architects and builders interested in sustainable building practices have a new source of professional advice to help them when it comes time to choose paints.

‘Painting has been one of the most toxic and polluting sectors of the construction industry’, says Daniel Wurm, spokesman and founder of the GreenPainters. ‘Not only has it led to contamination of water after cleaning up, and off-gassing into the atmosphere of poisonous and unhealthy chemicals, but has also contributed to health issues affecting both tradesmen and consumers.’ GreenPainters, launched Australia-wide this month, aims to change that through increasing the awareness of sustainable paints and coatings, and the implementation of environmentally-sensitive trade practices. With the recent push toward eco-consciousness, many consumers and tradesmen have become more aware of the consequences of using conventional paint systems.

Paints, lacquers and varnishes are among the chemical everyday products that have a particularly distinct effect on environment and health. Solvents, monomers, softening agents, and biocides are only some of the components of these products that present the potential for serious ecological and toxicological risks during their production, manufacture, application, use, and ultimate disposal.

Paints are a major source of indoor air pollution. Conventional paints can indoor air a chemical cocktail, even long after they have dried, as they continue to release petroleum based solvents, called Volatile Organic Compounds (VOCs) as they cure. It is estimated that each year in Australia more than 80,000 tonnes of VOCs are released into the atmosphere, with the paint industry contributing significantly to this amount. Studies have found that the cumulative VOC emissions from architectural painting operations exceed the combined emissions from a variety of industrial operations. VOCs from solvent and paint emissions contribute to harmful ozone formation and peroxyacetyl nitrate.

According to the Masters Painters Association, ozone ‘irritates eyes, nose, throat and lungs; reduces breathing capacity even in healthy adults and children; increases susceptibility to infection, hospital visits and admissions; [and] causes damage estimated to cost over millions of dollars per year to crops and buildings.’

Another problem with synthetic paints is post-application wastage and disposal. The petrochemical paints that currently dominate the market are predominately derived from oil, a non-renewable resource. Waste needs to be specially treated to avoid adverse environmental impacts. It has been estimated that water-soluble gloss paints require dilution of 40 million to 1 to render their entry to the sewerage system harmless.

However, there are safer alternatives to conventional paints.

Low-VOC Acrylics The benefits of choosing low or zero VOC paints are obvious - apart from being better for the environment, there are little or no fumes when painting. In 1997 the Australian Paint Approval Scheme began an initiative within the Australian paint industry that

aimed to reduce overall VOCs in locally manufactured paint. Many of the larger paint companies have produced products which have been certified to be 'environmentally friendly', but are still synthetic paints made from petrochemicals, with lower VOC concentrations.

However, 'these products are still a step in the right direction, and should be considered by specifiers and consumers who wish to use acrylic paints', says the Greenpainters Association.

Plant and Mineral Based Paints are made using naturally occurring ingredients, and therefore do not require high levels of processing. Many of the ingredients are made from renewable resources, such as linseed oil, and citrus oil. These paints use plant-derived solvents and binders instead of synthetic ones, so have VOC levels of between 0-.1% and are generally well-tolerated by humans and the environment. There is no testing on animals. Ingredients used are printed on the label, or on a technical data sheet which can be consulted to establish whether allergic reactions are a risk. It results in better health outcomes, and uses renewable resources for sustainable living. Some of the paints are even certified carbon neutral.

"Most plant-based paints meet or exceed Australian standards, are just as durable as toxic paints, and in some cases are longer-lasting", comments Mr Wurm. "You can have any color as long as it's 'green'! Using natural paints doesn't mean you can't have the latest fashion colours, and it won't cost the earth. GreenPainters members have already used these products on many projects around Australia"

Using non-toxic paints also means that when it comes time to wash-up, the run-off won't spoil gardens, or pollute storm-water, which is ultimately better for the environment. In fact, any waste water used when cleaning up after using natural paints can be used to water gardens, which is critical when considering Australia's current water crisis.

GreenPainters is a non-profit organisation of professional tradesmen, established to provide advice, knowledge and skills to help consumers get the best environmentally-friendly, non-toxic coating for their painting and decorating project. Their web-site www.greenpainters.com.au provides objective summaries of sustainable paints and coatings, and information to help builders and renovators achieve the look they want while being environmentally sensitive and health-conscious

If you would like more information about this topic or you would like to arrange an interview, please contact Steve Williams on 0410 023467, or email info@greenpainters.com.au