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Solid Waste

New Voluntary Standard to Promote Use of Recycled Paint

Green Seal Inc., a Washington, D.C., nonprofit group that identifies and promotes environmentally friendly products and services, is developing a voluntary standard for recycled latex paints.

The goal is to develop a national standard that will ensure the environmental, performance, and safety characteristics of recycled paint are consistent with comparable virgin paints, according to the proposed standard released April 16.

"The issue is waste. Everyone has leftover paint in their garage. They don't know how much they're going to need, they buy too much, usually they leave it for years. If they try to do something, they don't know what to do," Arthur Weissman, president and chief executive officer of Green Seal, told BNA. "We're closing the loop by turning what would otherwise be useless waste into a new, viable product that can be used by consumers without using more resources."

In fact, used, water-based latex paints are so ubiquitous they are the

number one household hazardous waste, Scott Cassel, director of the Boston-based Product Stewardship Institute (PSI), a nonprofit group that encourages the recycling of consumer products, said. It is the biggest item by volume at household hazardous waste collection centers and very expensive for state and local governments to manage, he said.

"The cost involved in drying and solidifying paint for disposal is growing. Even if a community wanted to waste these resources, it's becoming more expensive to treat as waste," Cassel said. "It's also the material with the greatest reuse and recycling potential."

The proposed standard is part of a larger PSI initiative known as the Paint Product Stewardship Initiative undertaken at the urging of state and local governments. PSI describes the initiative as a "dialogue" between over 60 stakeholders, including contractors; federal, state, and local government agencies; manufacturers; and recyclers to divert used paint from disposal to reuse.

The standard proposed by Green Seal addresses issues such as collection and sorting requirements, health and environmental requirements, packaging, labeling, certification, and end-of-life materials

management. The big issue, however, is how well recycled paint works, Weissman said.

"Performance is the big issue here," Weissman said. "For all of us interested in promoting the reuse of old paint, the big issue is to get users to accept it. You have to show the stuff not only is attractive, but also works, that it won't be worthless."

To address the performance issue, Green Seal turned to the Master Painters Institute, "an internationally recognized organization that develops performance standards and certifies a wide array of paints and coatings," according to the standard. To qualify for Green Seal certification, recycled paints will have to comply with the appropriate MPI performance standard and appear in the current edition of the MPI Approved Products List, which identifies manufacturers whose products have been tested and approved by MPI for over 70 categories of paint.

"We're using the same standards we use for virgin paint so we can show consumers this paint is as good as virgin paint," Weissman said.

The comment period on the proposed standard closed May 31, and Green Seal hopes to issue the final standard by Aug. 31.

BY TOD M. ROBINSON