

Accord debuts eco-label for I&I cleaning products



BY BRONWYN CAPANNA*

A new eco-label for industrial and institutional (I&I) cleaning products will shortly be seen on products in the Australian marketplace. 'Recognised – environmental credentials scheme' is a voluntary, multiple-criteria based third-party accreditation scheme developed by industry body Accord.

This scheme recognises that although efficacy is the number one consideration for I&I cleaning products, there is increasing demand for products with environmentally preferable characteristics.

Disillusioned with the proliferation of seemingly unsubstantiated environmental claims in the I&I marketplace, Accord took on the challenging task of developing its own environmental credentials scheme.

This scheme was designed as two parts: a rigorous set of criteria defining the characteristics of environmentally preferable I&I cleaning products; and an independent third-party scientific assessment to determine whether products meet the criteria.

The result?

A 'sound and robust...science-based, targeted and pragmatic set of criteria', coupled with a 'sound and transparent' third-party scientific accreditation process. These were the findings of the report of the independent panel of expert toxicologists upon review of the scheme.¹

This scheme covers, but is not limited to, the following products for use in I&I applications:

- hard surface cleaning products including general purpose cleaners, bathroom cleaners, toilet bowl cleaners, glass cleaners, floor cleaners and oven cleaners
- carpet and upholstery cleaners
- hand hygiene products
- laundry detergents
- dishwashing products
- automotive cleaners
- sanitisers

What does the scheme achieve?

It identifies environmentally preferable I&I cleaning products through science-based criteria. These criteria were developed by a working

group of chemists and technical specialists from industry over an 18-month period, and reviewed by an independent panel of expert toxicologists as being sound and robust.

It focuses on the environment. This may sound strangely unnecessary to emphasise, but quite remarkably some 'eco'-labels focus primarily on human health impacts and have very few criteria relating to potential environmental harm. The criteria for this scheme centre on the potential environmental impacts of I&I cleaning products, but also recognise the importance of human health by prohibiting, restricting or requiring disclosure of certain chemical ingredients, for example toxic substances, known or suspected carcinogens and mutagens, and sensitisers. The assessment process is evidence-based.

It promotes flexible approaches to environmental formulation. Simplistic and unexplained criteria - such as banned lists of ingredients - are avoided. Rather, assessment of the product's environmental impact is based upon the US EPA's approach: considering its aquatic toxicity in conjunction with its biodegradability and biopersistance. This approach also enables the criteria to effectively span a range of I&I cleaning product categories without compromising their rigor for any one category.

It does not duplicate mandatory requirements. This would be a form of 'greenwashing', since it passes off compliance with existing regulations as something exceptional, rather than the legal requirement that it is.

It maximises accessibility by minimising cost. There is a flat-rate application fee, based on the cost of the third-party scientific assessment. Plus a licence fee for products that pass the assessment to cover administration and use of the logo. There is no turnover-based fee. The scheme is open to members and non-members of Accord.

It is open and transparent. Rationalisation is provided for each of the criteria to help promote understanding of the characteristics of environmentally preferable I&I cleaning products. There is also rationalisation for the omission of criteria that are irrelevant to I&I cleaning products, unnecessary, or too complex to be addressed through a simple criterion. Additionally, all materials relating to the scheme will be publicly available.

When is it happening?

Applications to use the 'Recognised – environmental credentials scheme' will be accepted in the upcoming months. Get in early to make the most of this new scheme, one that promises to add clarity and certainty around environmental claims in the I&I market.

www.accord.asn.au/envirocreds

About the third-party scientific assessor: Toxikos is a Melbourne-based consultancy of toxicology and regulatory affairs specialists with extensive academic and corporate experience. www.toxikos.com
1 - Consisting of: Prof. Barry Hart, Director, Water Science Pty Ltd and Monash University; Prof. Michael Moore, University of Queensland, Water Quality Research Australia; Dr Margaret Hartley, Formerly Director, Office of Chemical Safety and Principle Scientific Advisor, Australian Government Department of Health and Ageing
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