

CleaningGreen

B Keep your home and the environment squeaky clean.

The routine task of cleaning may no longer be routine when a consumer decides to make the commitment to use green products, because the market is always emerging. How does one sift through the myriad products available?

Such a change in the materials we use to clean represents a paradigm shift and often a change in the contents of well-recognized brands, notes Martin Wolf, director of Product and Environmental Technology at Seventh Generation, a company that has a complete line of environmentally responsible products. Wolf is known as the company's

"Scioceman," educating the public about what it means to be green.

While Seventh Generation's focus has been on developing products that are commonly referred to as "green," other cleaning brands that have been on the shelves for decades now have



new lines that contain more natural, less-toxic materials, Wolf says. And, these well-recognized brands have gone through major overhauls in their contents in the past.

"While the brands may have persisted since the 19th century, the chemistries have changed," he explains. "We've been sold through advertising that these changes are what you want."

Different circumstances that existed at various points in history have required manufacturers to change what they put in the products, Wolf says. For example, less access to coconut oil for soaps during World War II influenced the development of synthetic chemistries to use in cleaning products. Another example is the advent of television and mass advertising in the 1960s and '70s, which had a significant impact on the way people think about cleaning. The materials in the products were not always healthy, he notes.

"We are just trained to have these concepts of what is clean and what is desirable," he says. "We went through a paradigm shift with mass advertising then, and I think we must go through a paradigm shift now."

Some manufacturers of green products promote an economic incentive by making one product that has multiple functions, such as Basic-H², an organic, non-toxic cleaner, produced by Shaklee Corp., says

Joanne Webb, director of a Shaklee distributorship. Webb's business is based in Lafayette. Basic-H² can be used for such tasks as wiping kitchen countertops, cleaning windows, hand washing clothes,

cleaning vegetables and any home-cleaning task.

"Our products are multi-purposed and concentrated," she notes. "For example, 16 ounces of Basic-H² makes 48 gallons of cleaner. That brings savings to the family economy and savings to the planet's environment."

Webb purchased her first bottle of Basic-H² 33 years ago because she wanted to contribute to reducing pollution, which was one of the earlier words used to describe toxicity in the environment. She wanted to be more careful about what she was putting down the drain in her home and to protect her children from toxins.

"As a consequence, I decided to promote the products, but that was about six years later."

Basic-H² is biodegradable, which means that the product can break down into materials that won't harm the earth, Webb explains.





Shaklee also makes other green products, such as Scour Off, which can be used to scrub bathtubs and sinks.

"It's more gentle, and it doesn't have toxins in the product," she says.

"Scour Off is made with cherry pits."

Advocates say buying green products is not just a trend, but reducing toxins in the home matters because exposure to chemicals has been linked to such health problems as asthma and other lung problems, cancer and birth defects.

"Most people are concerned about health and wellness above all else, and that is understandable," notes Wolf. He recommends using three components to decide whether a product could be considered green: health and wellness, environmental benefits, and how the product performs.

Performance has been a consistent complaint of consumers who use green cleaners, but product developers are always working to improve this aspect, which is one of the ways the market is emerging.

Shoppers should do research and learn what they can about environmentally friendly products, says Kathy Willowode, community outreach coordinator and nutritional counselor at The Sunspot Natural Market in West Lafayette.

Willowode also points to health and wellness as the primary issue.

"Health runs the gamut from food and environmental issues," she says. "There's your family support, your community support and the broader world environment. It's a continuum, and all of those things have

an effect on a person's health and the planet's health."

The Sunspot is known more for its selection of organic food items, but the store does sell green cleaning products.

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Bagging green

Once you've made the decision to use green cleaning products, another step to take is to buy and keep using green or "reusable" shopping bags at the grocery store.

They are inexpensive to buy, and consumers can stock up on them until they have enough to bag their groceries during a shopping trip.

"I imagine that most people would probably come in and buy one or two at a time, and then after you get used to using them, you say, 'I am just going to buy seven more,'" says Frank Guglielmi, director of public relations at Meijer Inc. The chain has 185 stores in Indiana, Michigan, Ohio, Illinois and Kentucky.

Meijer started selling the reusable bags for 99 cents a bag in October 2007, and consumers love them, he notes.

"We've had a huge response to them. We have sold nearly 2 million bags in just over a year. We didn't market the bags at all. We brought them in and put the bags on stands inside our stores at both entrances."

The reusable bags also sell for 99 cents at Marsh Supermarkets. Marsh has 104 locations in Indiana and Ohio.

"Marsh customers have embraced the green shopping bags," says Connie Gardner, senior director of community relations at Marsh. "Many of our customers have joined the 'green movement,' and this has been a great program for them.

At Meijer, the bags are made of recycled polypropylene, which is a plastic, but it has a canvas texture, explains Guglielmi. "The majority of the bag's materials are recycled," he says.

While the bags may look small, they are a practical choice to carry groceries, Gardner says. The bottom is solid, which makes the bag sturdy. "Many of our customers have been pleasantly surprised at how many groceries they can get in each bag," she notes.

At Marsh, customers get a monetary reward for reusing bags.

"The program gives 5 cents back to the customer for each bag that they bring in and we use to bag their order. Any bag is welcome, but we find more and more of our customers are bringing in the green bags for re-use," Gardner says. The green bags can be from any store, not just Marsh. The supermarket chain will give the rebate to customers who bring in paper or other cloth bags as well, she adds. While customers are using green bags more, the rebate promotion has been in effect at Marsh for 10 years.

In the spring of 2008, The Kroger Co. held a contest for interested consumers to design the company's next reusable bag. Kroger Co., based in Cincinnati, Ohio, has more than 2,476 supermarkets and multi-department stores in 31 states including the Pay Less grocery stores in Lafayette and West Lafayette. The contest's winners and their designs were displayed on Kroger's Web site. An Atlanta woman won a \$500 prize for her design, which featured the word, "reuse" on the bag. Kroger stores have a plastic bag recycling program, which enables customers to recycle their plastic bags, dry-cleaning bags and other plastic shrink wrap.

Sales of the reusable bags increased dramatically in 2008, says Meghan Glynn, spokesperson for The Kroger Co. "One of the reasons we did the contest is because people are using them for other purposes," she notes. "They are becoming household staples."

At Meijer, the chain has also started a plastic bag recycling program, says Guglielmi. Customers can bring in their plastic bags to place in a recycle bin in the stores.

Guglielmi and Gardner agree that the reusable bags serve as a good store promotion when the chains donate food and supplies to various community organizations.

"Groups in the community have come to us and asked for them, and we have made donations at around 1,000 at a time, so it's an item that we can also give to groups to use," he says. "For example, if we are giving a gift bag for a local charity auction, we'll take one of the reusables and stack it full of items and use that as a gift basket."



consider how the product is made in terms of energy efficiency, which is another standard that determines green, says Paul Sabol, district sales manager at Flex-Pac, Inc., an Indianapolis-based company that sells packaging and industrial cleaning and paper products to businesses in Greater Lafayette. Sabol uses the example of film packaging for a DVD, which is now sturdier, but uses fewer materials:

"First of all you are going to cut down the amount of petroleum in the product; it's not going to take as much to produce that roll because you are just not using that much energy; but you've got a product that's as strong."

Sabol works frequently with Spartan Chemical Co. Inc., a Maumee, Ohio, business-to-business company to promote new and efficient green cleaning products to Greater Lafayette businesses.

One way to determine if a product meets a "green standard" is to look for a Green Seal certification on a label, says David Jones, a regional manager at Spartan Chemical Co. Green Seal is an independent, non-profit organization that certifies products and services that apply for the seal.

"Green Seal serves a great purpose by helping to set a standard for 'green' that is widely acceptable," Jones says.

Shaklee offers Basic-H² in a gallon size, and that has the Green Seal certification for industrial use, says Webb.

And, when making the commitment to use green products, it's wise to purchase



them on the market because of safety and performance concerns, says Ron Cook, a chemist at Spartan Chemical Co.

“Home-brewed’ products have not been tested in terms of cleaning ability, toxicity and biodegradability,” Cook adds.

The first step, however, in using green products is to decide to do it and follow through, notes Willowood.

“You’ve got to make up your mind that you have to do something about improving the environment, and you have to take some responsibility as a consumer.” ❄



For more information about green products visit the Federal Trade Commission Facts for Consumers Web site at www.ftc.gov

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