Green Product Use Offers Market Advantage, Safety

A combination of increased acceptance of green building programs such as Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design (LEED), awareness of the importance of indoor air quality (IAQ), and consumer demand for green products likely will drive more manufacturers to develop better products and seek third-party certification for them in the future, a spokeswoman for GREENGUARD Environmental Institute predicted Jan. 10.

Laura Anne Spriggs, communications manager for GEI, told BNA Jan. 10 that companies offering “green” products can gain a competitive advantage over those that do not in today’s market because the public is becoming more focused on environmental and safety concerns.

Moreover, Spriggs contended, employers that build green protect both their employees and the environment and will not spend more to do so because green building is equivalent to simply using good quality products and careful construction practices. “The reality is a well-designed building is a green building,” she said.

GEI, an industry-independent organization and standards developer authorized by the American National Standards Institute, is the only third-party organization that certifies acceptable indoor air standards for buildings and indoor environments and products, Spriggs said. GEI’s primary goal, according to its Web site (http://www.greenguard.org), is to “improve public health and quality of life through programs that improve indoor air.”

Certifications Up 400 Percent

GEI tests products across all industries to certify them for low chemical and particle emissions, Spriggs said. For example, GEI tests air filters; ceiling systems; flooring; furniture; general construction materials such as insulation, office equipment, and wood and nonwood products; paints and other coatings; surface materials; textiles; and wall coverings.

More than 125 manufacturers, representing 20 different industries, have products certified by GEI since it was founded in June 2001, Spriggs said. That represents a growth of 400 percent just since 2005, she noted.

GEI walks the walk, according to Spriggs. On Dec. 10, 2007, GEI moved into a renovated headquarters facility in Atlanta. The facility complies with LEED-CI (commercial interiors) criteria, and GEI is in the process of having it certified both by LEED and its own Building Construction Program.

“The reality is, a well-designed building is a ‘green’ building.”
— LAURA ANNE SPRIGGS, GEI

When GEI needed to expand its headquarters, “[d]eciding to build ‘green’ was a no-brainer,” Spriggs told BNA. “GEI is committed to sustainability as a whole,” she noted, and while its focus is on IAQ, “we recognize the value of promoting all sustainable goals and educating consumers on how the different ‘green’ pieces fit together and support each other.” She added, “We also wanted the new space to serve as an educational tool to the community. Showcasing the LEED attributes and green materials is a great way to help the public understand what it means and that sustainability does not have to be a challenge.”

In March, Spriggs said, GEI plans to hold an open house both to show off the facility and give attendees an opportunity to tour the nearby Air Quality Sciences Inc. testing chamber GEI uses to gauge product emissions. Using products with low chemical and particle emissions is not only healthy for office end-users but for construction and manufacturing workers, Spriggs said. With regard to construction workers, she noted, “using products that are low emitting is important because [workers] are directly exposed to the products and chemicals in application. Wet products (coatings, paints, sealants) tend to be the biggest emitters because their emissions are constant as opposed to a chair, which will continue to off-gas less and less over time.”

“An effective IAQ management plan” under GEI’s GREENGUARD Indoor Air Quality Certified program, she said, “recommends installing wet products before dry and also using 100 percent outdoor ventilation” instead of central air conditioning. “In fact, the best recommendation is to seal up any vents/ducts during the construction process to avoid dust and chemicals from entering the central system then circulating the contaminants once the system is used by the occupants.”

Mold Concerns

The GREENGUARD for Building Construction program, introduced in 2006, protects building developers, insurers, and lenders from mold risk “by ensuring that buildings use industries’ best practices for safeguarding against the damage and resulting losses caused by mold,” GEI said.

“By implementing a program that reduces the chances for moisture intrusion, the builder can assure the owner that the building will not be affected by mold,” Spriggs told BNA. “Mold is a contributor to poor indoor air quality. The effects on occupants can range from short-term irritation to respiratory infections (in sensitive individuals). This, in turn, can lead to health impairment, loss of productivity, or the loss of use of a facility.”

Nine buildings, including GEI’s new headquarters, are registered to obtain certification. “We expect five buildings will be certified in the first few months of 2008,” Spriggs said.

Constructing a quality building that is proof against mold may cost a bit more up front, Spriggs conceded. However, she said, if a company goes for the lowest bid it may be hit with huge mold remediation bills down the road. Following a program of prevention such as that offered by GEI is just “good design,” she contended.

By BETH DUNCAN