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# GREENGUARD: The Intersection of Sustainability and Health

By Cory Vanderpool | June 24th, 2010 [View Comments](#)

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Concerns about indoor air pollution and “sick building syndrome” have increased in recent years as groups like the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) report on research showing that the quality of indoor air can be many times worse than outdoor air. Most people spend as much as 90 percent of their day indoors, making the health risks from indoor air pollutants a significant concern. One organization, **GREENGUARD Environmental Institute (GEI)**, is helping to protect

human health and quality through outreach and education, as well as by certifying building products and materials for low chemical emissions

**Volatile organic compounds (VOCs)** are one of the biggest sources of indoor air pollution and they originate from the products and materials that we use in our homes and buildings every day- including furniture, mattresses, cleaning products and electronics. VOCs can trigger asthma symptoms, headaches, nausea, throat irritation, delayed cognition and even reproductive and developmental disorders.

The success of green building programs represents a step in the right direction, but more still needs to be done to ensure that green buildings are also healthier for occupants. Many green buildings focused on energy efficiency are built to be practically airtight, which can seal in VOCs and other pollutants. Choosing **products** that are low-emitting, like those certified by GREENGUARD, may be a better way to reduce airborne chemical emissions and indoor air pollution.

GREENGUARD is 100% voluntary and includes an **Indoor Air Quality Certification** and a **Children & Schools Certification**. Both programs ensure that a product is low-emitting by requiring it to undergo rigorous scientific testing, quarterly monitoring and annual re-certification.

Manufacturers who achieve certification demonstrate a commitment to human health and healthier indoor environments. Certification takes dedication and determination and can sometimes require manufacturers to reformulate their chemical composition, supply chain and manufacturing processes just to pass.

The folks at GREENGUARD are pleased with the increased awareness about indoor air quality. They are fielding more and more inquiries from concerned parents about products that give off a certain “smell” and they are seeing the proliferation of “NO VOC” and “LOW VOC” paints on store shelves. But there is still a **gap in awareness** between things like VOC content and VOC emissions. For instance, **not all** paints labeled “no VOC” or “low VOC” are actually low-emitting.

Their goal is to help the industry realize that at the heart of sustainability is the creation of buildings that have a minimal impact on the planet and on the people that occupy them. GREENGUARD believes that good indoor air quality and pre-occupancy clearance testing should be a prerequisite for all sustainable building programs, not just an option.

With so many products sold in the U.S. being manufactured in China and surrounding nations, GEI decided to expand their influence with the recently **announced** debut of its overseas operations in Beijing, China.

If you want to reduce the toxic air in your building, choose low-emitting products and materials and regularly ventilate your home or building with outdoor air. For more information, please visit their redesigned website at [www.greenguard.org](http://www.greenguard.org)

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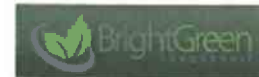


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