

Coming Clean on Sustainability

“Forward-looking companies in the cleaning product supply chain are embedding sustainability into their corporate DNA,” says Brian Sansoni, VP of communication and membership and VP of sustainability initiatives at the American Cleaning Institute (www.cleaninginstitute.org).

Today, he says, sustainability is impacting purchasing, manufacturing, sourcing, waste diversion and water use. As a result, consumer packaged goods (CPG) companies and their fragrance suppliers are subjected to increasing levels of scorecarding and questionnaires related to their sustainability practices. These compliance demands, often driven by non-governmental organizations (NGO), cascades from the retailer level through to the ingredient suppliers.

“We’ve seen the fragrance suppliers to the cleaning products industry really step up their game in sustainability,” Sansoni explains. “They’re getting more questions than ever before and they’re taking their role in sustainability very seriously.”

Fragrance suppliers have, for instance, pledged to eliminate the use of virgin materials in manufacturing, reduce water usage, eliminate elements from products that do not add value, and cut CO₂ emissions, energy use, water consumption and waste. Meanwhile, these suppliers are backward integrating key ingredients for greater transparency, supply stability and ethical sourcing.

“The supply challenges are increasing,” Sansoni acknowledges.

The retailers, often in cooperation with NGOs and in response to consumer-right-to-know movements, have become a growing regulating force in the supply chain, setting their own standards on chemistry and other facets.

For instance, Walmart and Sam’s Club have set policies on sustainable chemistry in consumables, including disclosure of fragrance ingredients.

In its report, Walmart noted that it would provide consumers with ingredient CAS numbers; full disclosure of all ingredients, including those typically protected under trade secrets (e.g., fragrances); known residuals, contaminants and byproducts; identification of ingredient function and uses; product formula number; hazard information (e.g., MSDS/SDS data); and priority chemicals that have been removed from the product or portfolio of products, in conformance with the Federal Trade Commission’s (FTC) Green Guides.

Walmart U.S. and Sam’s Club U.S. said they will work toward formulating and labeling their private brand products in accordance with the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency’s Design for the Environment (DfE) program, beginning with cleaning products and expanding to other categories as the program grows.



In a similar move, Target has set its new sustainability standard, which will assess personal care and cleaning products based on ingredient disclosure and safety and environmental impact. The move was lauded by the Campaign for Safe Cosmetics for “redefining sustainability for consumers and manufacturers.”

The retailer will work with Good Guide (www.goodguide.com) to evaluate and rank products on a scale of 100, with 70% of points tied to disclosure. This full disclosure will include what the campaign calls “secret ingredients that hide under the generic term ‘fragrance.’” The final scores on products will be used by Target to determine which products it stocks.

Despite the accolades, the campaign has faulted Target for not making its rankings public. Nor is it happy that there is not yet a minimum allowable score set by the retailer.

“There’s no one standard set of questions that are being asked across the retail landscape,” Sansoni explains. “That’s probably the biggest challenge our members—who are supplying these places—are facing.”

Sansoni notes that ACI and its members would ultimately like to see a simplified response process for sustainability inquiries, allowing even small suppliers to manage customer requests by attempting to somewhat standardize response requirements. This is further complicated by ongoing pressure on retailers from NGOs.

Looking ahead, he says, water, energy and waste will be core areas of focus in improving sustainability. Companies will also expand the information they’re sharing about these elements. Suppliers and brands are more transparent than ever before, says Sansoni, with regards to the amount of information they are providing customers, retailers and consumers. As sustainability reporting standards grow in intensity and difficulty, Sansoni believes it is increasingly important that suppliers and manufacturers make more effort to tell their sustainability stories to consumers in a meaningful, relevant and understandable way that focuses on how they use products and what matters to them.

For examples of how ACI and its members are tackling sustainability issues, visit www.cleaninginstitute.org/sustainability2013/.

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