

Greenwashing a cause of general confusion

Attending the world's leading trade fair for the cleaning industry –

ISSA/InterClean Amsterdam one would expect not to find evidence of

Greenwashing, but was I wrong?

Having spent a lot of time standing in the wings listening to the sales pitches delivered to trade fair visitors one would expect the exhibitor to be the "expert" in their field and the power of "knowledge" and "authority" takes over to convince the listener. No wonder the cleaning industry is so confused.

Due to the emphasis on the Environment and Green, every supplier to the cleaning industry feels obliged to churn out a Green offering, whether they are equipped or able to deliver a truly green product or not. This fact sometimes raises the question if multinational companies bargain on the perceived lack of understanding of the service provider in making available a product that does not meet international standards.

Some of the revolutionary new products such as the space-age looking transparent spray bottle that converts tap water into ionised water which is supported by impressive marketing material serves as a good example because having tested the unit locally it proved that the unit does not deliver on what is promised in the

marketing material. The "third party" laboratory microbial efficacy testing could not be achieved. This is just another example of how brilliant marketing can be deceiving.

However, those chemical manufacturers who already carry the flower logo (EU Ecolabel) delivered a much better sales pitch and users of cleaning products would be well advised to procure from them.

Traditionally green cleaning products have a reputation for not being good cleaners but the EU Ecolabel is the first Ecological Accreditation Authority to test efficacy of the products along with the ingredients and the method of manufacturing. EU Ecolabel will not accredit a cleaning product just on its make-up but also its ability to meet the expectation of the user.

In talking to a number of the chemical manufacturing exhibitors that do not carry the flower logo one finds that they all claimed to have totally biodegradable products but offered no proof or any test results to demonstrate the claim.

Exhibitors selling disinfectants were the ones that really caused confusion. There were numerous "green"; "natural" and "organic"

disinfectants on show. It should be considered that no disinfectant can ever be green as the minute it kills anything – good and bad – it can no longer be regarded as friendly to the environment. It is exactly for this reason that the EU Ecolabel don't have a category for disinfectants.

The majority of the disinfectants masquerading as "organic"; "natural" and "green" has biflavanoid (citrus extract) as an active ingredient, also known as D-limonene. Now consider that D-limonene, in the presence of ozone, becomes formaldehyde – a highly toxic and carcinogenic agent and in North America many scientific papers testify and contribute to its bad reputation.

Various authorities have warned the user to regard any product promoted as natural or organic as suspicious as this might be a way to detract from potentially harmful ingredients contained in the products.

It has become fashionable to

include a disinfecting agent in cleaning chemicals and due to the abovementioned fact, that then immediately disqualifies the product as green. Furthermore, various studies have reported on the dangers of using disinfecting agents for general purpose cleaning. A recent study carried out by the Department of Microbiology, School of Natural Sciences, at the National University of Ireland investigated the link between adaptation to biocides and antibiotics in *Pseudomonas aeruginosa*, concluded that incorrectly diluted disinfectants left on surfaces could promote the growth of antibiotic-resistant bacteria. What is more worrying is that bacteria seems to be able to adapt a resistance to antibiotics without exposure to it.

It seems that for the sake of selling a product, bending the truth out of proportion is the order of the day. Therefore the procurement process has become a very difficult



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task, as subject matter experts would be required to sift through mounds of disinformation and deceiving marketing material before issuing a purchase order. *ACR*

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