

SPOT ON

RECYCLED PAINT GOOD AS NEW



BY GALEN RICARD

A COAT OF FRESH PAINT can make almost anything look as good as new.

And if it's recycled paint, you can be assured that it's good as new, too. If it has a Green Seal of approval, that is – a new national certification that Cal Poly research helped make possible.

No surprise that California, with its groundbreaking environmental policies, was the catalyst for this greening-of-paint initiative. No surprise either about Cal Poly's vital role in the project.

Cal Poly's Polymers and Coatings Program is the only one of its kind west of the Mississippi. The program's independent laboratory facilities made it ideal for the testing and research needed to develop the nation's first environmental product standards for recycled paints.

"No university is doing what we're doing in terms of testing and analysis," said Dane Jones, one of the chemistry and biochemistry faculty members who developed the program nearly 20 years ago.

The recycled paint certification applies only to water-based latex products – but that's a big target: Sixty-four million gallons of leftover latex paint lurk in garages or clog waste streams. The buckets of leftover paint are the equivalent of 10 percent of all paint sold annually.

Green Seal is an independent nonprofit organization that promotes the production and use of environmentally preferable products and services. A Green Seal label on the can means the recycled paint, in addition to being environmentally preferable, meets the same high Master Painters Institute standards that are set for newly manufactured paints. That's the "gold bar" of quality assurance that gives consumers confidence in the product and provides incentive for paint companies to expand their line of recycled paints.

That combination of MPI quality standards and the Green Seal environmental seal of approval creates a powerful marketing tool, explained Jones.

And an expanded marketplace means increased recycling and a reduced waste stream. Of all household wastes, paint is the most expensive to collect and manage. The costs for municipalities to manage leftover consumer paint averages \$8 per gallon.

"Is it all just beige"? That's a question often heard by Ray Fernando, director of Cal Poly's Polymers and Coatings Program. A research chemist with extensive knowledge of water-based coating technology, Fernando holds the Arthur C. Edward Endowed Chair for Polymers and Coatings at the university.

"Consumers generally think of recycled paints as inferior," noted Fernando. "The new standards will assure consumers, architects and specifiers that certified recycled paints are top-quality materials – with the added benefit of being environmentally responsible."

The new standard was developed in partnership with the Product Stewardship Institute, which facilitated dialog with more than 60 stakeholders, including paint manufacturers, recyclers, painting contractors and government agencies.

Dunn-Edwards Paint Co. was among the leading proponents of the certification effort and funded the initial feasibility study conducted by Cal Poly. The California Integrated Waste Management Board and the Portland Metro Regional Government were also among major funders of the breakthrough research project.

"Paint is a highly manufactured product that uses very expensive non-renewable resources, so it just makes sense to use it to the fullest extent possible," said Jones. □