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New Report Details Safer Chemicals Use by Six Major Companies

Source: GreenBiz.com

NEW YORK, June 29, 2006 - A new study illuminates how some companies are working to eliminate toxic chemicals and materials in their products and building materials. The report, *Healthy Business Strategies for Transforming the Toxic Chemical Economy*, by the nonprofit Clean Production Action (CPA), profiles the toxics-reduction efforts by Avalon Natural Products, Dell Inc., H&M, Herman Miller, Interface, and Kaiser Permanente.

CPA's research director, Mark Rossi states, "Our report draws attention to how each of these companies has embarked on the journey to green chemistry and healthy materials. Each shows us in their own distinctive way that it's important to work towards a cleaner future by taking action today."

The report highlights a cross-section of products including famous Herman Miller ergonomic, yet sleek office chairs, H&M's affordable fashion-forward clothing, and the nontoxic carpet specially commissioned by Kaiser Permanente for its hospitals. CPA hopes that by showing a broad range of company products and innovative approaches to using safer chemicals other companies will adopt similar practices such as conducting internal hazard assessments, investing in plant-based materials, applying green chemistry and green engineering principles and making safe chemicals research and production a priority within their supply chains.

Each company in the report shows leadership initiative in its efforts to ban hazards from its products, and investment in protecting and enhancing its brand.

According to Mark Newton, Dell Senior Consultant for Environmental Policy and Global Requirements, the company's chemicals management system is the first step in a long journey towards responsible chemical management: "We and the others in our industry realize we are at the beginning of a long journey. As a relatively young industry we're learning quickly how to meet both business and environmental goals and how to effectively manage these issues with our supply chain."

All of the companies' investments are paying off in different ways: from cost savings and the creation of new sub-markets to product differentiation, reduced reputation risk and improved quality. For



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companies seeking similar results, their efforts show a clear path for corporations to better manage chemicals in their supply chains and products, according to the report.

According to Interface director of environmental management, Wendy Porter, who helped design a plant-based office fabric using safe dyes, "Our unique knowledge gives our salesperson an edge over the competition. We even get inquiries from our competitors, who want to know if certain chemicals are okay to use."

Cleaner products make for healthier homes and families, says Avalon Vice President Morris Shriftman. "We want our customers to be conscious of what they put on their skin," she says. "We want them to understand that it's not just about the small amount of a chemical in a single cosmetic. It's about the cumulative risk for a woman applying and re-applying cosmetics 15, 20, even 25 times in a single day -- shower gels, cleansers, toners, shampoos, conditioners, moisturizers, mascara, lipstick, deodorants, creams with penetration enhancers, and so on."

The report also highlights the importance of partnering with companies that share the same commitment. When Kaiser Permanente decided it needed to use carpets that were both PVC-free and met its criteria for hospital use it discovered that no such carpet met its demanding specifications. Not willing to compromise, Kaiser Permanente decided to develop a new product that not only met its needs, but was also manufactured by a company that would fulfill the environmental commitments that Kaiser Permanente had made. Tom Cooper of Kaiser Permanente's Standards, Planning, and Design team emphasized, "Partnering is about dialogue, finding shared interests, and moving forward with better products."

"Rather than continuing to take an approach that is problem-focused (for example, eliminating mercury or PVC), we want our work to be solution-focused," emphasized Lynn Garske, Kaiser Permanente's environmental stewardship manager. "Our aspiration is to provide health care services in a manner that enhances the environment and communities now and for future generations."

H&M found that if you tell the world your product does not contain a chemical, you cannot compromise. The company stayed true to its progressive chemical policy when they had to pull a highly marketed item during its 2002 Christmas underwear campaign. With a marketing campaign using famous models posing in H&M underwear already underway, the company found that the sequins used to decorate some underwear products contained PVC. Chemists and quality control had missed the 100% PVC sequins because, up until that point, all PVC uses were in soft plastics. H&M's Corporate Responsibility department convinced the company to drop the product.

Herman Miller's products remind us that the real opportunities for safe products begin at the design stage. "Only by incorporating environment into design," explains Don Goeman, executive vice president for Research, Design and Development at Herman Miller, "can we create value rather than cost." This company has made Design for Environment a priority since 1953 and has continued to push the boundaries of corporate responsibility by demanding full and transparent chemicals data from their suppliers to developing their own rigorous scoring and grading system for materials used in their many furnishings. The company intends to maintain its trajectory by setting itself a goal that 50% of all sales in 2010 must be from products that meet their Design for Environment and green chemicals protocol.

These six well-known companies are proof that safer chemicals use in products is a goal whose time has come, the report concludes. The case studies show how different tools and approaches can be used -- but there must be commitment that the effort will be worth the price.

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