

Wal-Mart Wants To Know The Score

From Volume 99, Issue 5 - July 2009

Some observers believe [Wal-Mart Stores Inc.](#)'s efforts to become more environmentally responsible and sustainable started as a campaign to improve the company's image, but without question, this quest is now serious business for the mega-retailer.

In the past three or four years, the company has launched a number of green and sustainable projects under a variety of names, including Sustainability 360, the Global Innovation Project, as well as the Preferred Chemical Principles program.

It is this last program, commonly referred to as the "score card," in which [The Ashkin Group LLC](#) has been invited to participate.

Essentially, the program's goal is to phase out harmful chemicals used and sold in its stores and to influence how certain cleaning chemicals are manufactured.

The program mandates the removal of chemical ingredients that "have been identified as known, likely or probable human carcinogens, mutagens or reproductive toxins" as well as those products that are identified as persistent, bioaccumulative and potentially toxic to the environment.

Although many of these cleaning-related products have proven track records of performing well, new technologies have evolved that now allow JanSan manufacturers to produce cost-effective, high-performing environmentally preferable equivalents.

Wal-Mart wants these alternative products to be used and marketed in its stores.

As noted above, the score card program is also designed to influence how cleaning chemicals, as well as other chemical products, are manufactured.

How can Wal-Mart do this?

The answer is relatively simple.

Because the retailer is so large and powerful, with many companies wishing to be vendors and scores of others seeking shelf space in its stores, manufacturers around the globe are anxious to accommodate the retailer any way they can.

How The Score Card System Works

Wal-Mart's definition of a chemical product is anything that contains a powder, gel, paste or liquid

that is not intended for human consumption.

Professional cleaning chemicals as well as household cleaning products fall into this category.

To determine if a chemical product is green and/or more sustainable compared to a conventional product used for the same purpose, Wal-Mart suppliers must complete an assessment that asks for a variety of "cradle-to-grave" details such as these:

1. Name of the company or manufacturer of the product, including corporate as well as emergency contact information
2. Product information such as the name, the Universal Product Code (UPC) and how the product is used
3. Information from the manufacturer such as a list of the product's ingredients and suspected contaminants, a material safety data sheet (MSDS) if available, physiochemical data, flashpoint and boiling point information and other ingredient-related data
4. Transportation information such as the modes of transportation used to ship the product, packaging weight and the types of materials used to package the product
5. The eventual biodegradability of the product.

The product is assigned a number or score based on how well it meets Wal-Mart's current guidelines and standards for these and other criteria.

That score determines whether the product can be used or sold in its stores.

For those chemicals used in the professional cleaning industry, much of this information gathering and evaluation has already been done if the product has been certified by a recognized certification organization such as [EcoLogo](#), [Green Seal Inc.](#) or a similar organization, or if the product was developed and manufactured per their guidelines.

In most situations, products certified by one of these organizations will meet the retailer's guidelines.

Turning To Experts

Wal-Mart is turning to several green and environmental experts for help with its purchasing decisions.

As mentioned earlier, The Ashkin Group has been invited to advise the company regarding the selection of cleaning chemicals.

But other consultants and organizations have been tapped to help the retailer evaluate many other products, from cosmetics to paper products.

And Wal-Mart cares about not only what its manufacturers produce and its customers purchase, but if power and size can persuade what is sold and marketed to other retailers.

Ultimately, it just makes sense and is less expensive for a supplier to produce and market more environmentally responsible and sustainable products to all its customers.

This likely means that its score card program will have an impact on the type of products sold not only to its stores but also to many other retailers, and this in turn will contribute greatly to protecting our environment.