

TileDealer

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THE GREEN MARKETPLACE

Competing in a
Sustainable World

2010



Participating in LEED Projects • Recycling Tile
Sustainable Showrooms • Green Products

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Cover image: Crossville® Empire Porcelain Stone® which now boasts 20% SCS-certified recycled content.



One - on - One...

with GREENGUARD's Dr. Marilyn Black

“GREENGUARD Certification fundamentally changes entire industries for the good of human health.”

By Jeffrey Steele

The Marietta, Georgia-based GREENGUARD Environmental Institute (GEI) is a third-party organization founded to improve human health and quality of life through programs addressing the indoor air people breathe. GEI oversees the International GREENGUARD Certification Program, which requires products, including tile, to meet some of the world's strictest indoor air quality standards, and has helped drive market adoption of safer construction materials and interior furnishings.

TileDealer recently caught up for an interview with founder, Dr. Marilyn Black, who is also an expert on characterizing indoor air pollution and determining its relation to human health.

TileDealer: GREENGUARD has been around a relatively short time. What was the process behind its development?

Black: I founded the GREENGUARD Environmental Institute in 2001 as a way to help manufacturers ensure their products were non-toxic and low-emitting for healthier indoor environments—and to help them communicate that value proposition to the marketplace. My background is in chemistry and public health. I am a scientist first and foremost and have been researching chemical emissions and indoor air pollution for over 30 years. I helped pioneer indoor air quality research and environmental chamber test methodology in the U.S. during the energy crisis of the later 1970s and early 1980s, just as “sick buildings” were gaining notoriety. It was also at that time that I founded my company, Air Quality Sciences, Inc. (AQS), which

screens products and materials for more than 10,000 airborne chemicals via state-of-the-art environmental chamber technology. We spent the first year developing environmental chamber technology that could reproducibly measure chemical emissions from products down to the part-per-trillionth level. After several years of providing chemical emissions testing and data analysis for manufacturers across the globe, it became clear that the marketplace—and the general public—had a right to know which products were proven to be low-emitting. As a scientist, my research showed how deleterious exposure to volatile organic compounds (VOCs) can be to human health. It became a matter of protecting human health by allowing consumers to make more informed decisions about their purchases.

By creating the GREENGUARD Environmental Institute, a wholly-independent, not-for-profit organization, I was able to help consumers find products that contributed to healthier indoor environments. And at the same time, I could help manufacturers, who, as a testament to their commitment to sustainability and human health, voluntarily signed up for the certification process to differentiate their products.

TileDealer: How big is GREENGUARD now?

Black: The GREENGUARD Environmental Institute has been growing steadily since its

inception in 2001. GREENGUARD has developed five key standards and test methods for certifying a wide range of products for chemical emissions and IAQ performance. Today, more than 280 manufacturers from all over the world participate in the GREENGUARD Certification Program, and more than 11,000 GREENGUARD Certified products are available on the market.

A large segment of our manufacturers produce commercial products (office and classroom furniture, building construction materials), but we are in the process of expanding into the residential market to certify non-commercial products, such as household appliances, home furnishings, and children's products. Currently there are more than 24 categories of certified products, including paints and coatings, bedding, furniture, insulations, flooring, countertops, kitchen cabinetry, cleaners, and consumer electronics. We are also growing an international presence with offices opening in Europe and Asia.

TileDealer: Does GREENGUARD have any competitors in the marketplace?

Black: As the green building movement started gaining momentum, a slew of green labels and green certifications began flooding the marketplace. Unfortunately, this trend gave way to what we now know as "greenwashing," the act of making false or unfounded claims about a product's environmental impact. A recent study showed that 98-percent of products in the marketplace today are guilty of greenwashing to some degree, and that's a mind-boggling number! So certainly there are other so-called certifying bodies out there that claim to verify a product as low-emitting, but you have to do some digging to find out whether they are legitimate.

Many are self-declared certifications and/or industry-based certifications. Only a few are third-party certifiers. And when it comes to indoor air quality certification, none establish leadership standards or examine a product's chemical emissions to the extent we do. Rather they account merely for the product's chemical content or verify to an existing industry standard or specification. The fact is, there are no other certifications out there that are as scientifically-grounded, rigorous, and reliable as GREENGUARD Certification.

TileDealer: Do you foresee others (competitors) being established?

Black: I wouldn't be surprised if competitors were to emerge; green is becoming increasingly popular and simultaneously nebulous. However, the GREENGUARD Environmental Institute, as I mentioned, is poised for major growth, and that means adapting to market needs and demands. And possibly expanding our service offerings to make ourselves even more competitive.

But no matter how we evolve and expand, we will always maintain our integrity and uphold our pledge to quality and protection of human health above everything else.

TileDealer: To what does GREENGUARD credit its growth and credibility in the marketplace?

Black: Our success is due largely, if not entirely, to our dedicated manufacturers and the transformation of their many products. These manufacturers volunteer to undergo the rigorous certification process because they are committed to providing high-quality, low-emitting products to the marketplace. We are not in the business of "Rubber stamping," and these manufacturers are aware of this. Often achieving certification requires a manufacturer to go back to the drawing board to change the chemical composition of their products, make adjustments to their supply chain, or change a manufacturing procedure. It's not an easy process. And it's not a one-time-only affair; these manufacturers must undergo quarterly and annual re-testing to maintain their certification. Their products are screened for more than 10,000 chemicals, and any toxic chemical has to be removed. This takes a great deal of time and commitment. So, without our manufacturers, the GREENGUARD Environmental Institute would never be where it is today. We also owe a lot to our dedicated in-house staff, which truly believes in our mission to protect public health and quality of life and is instrumental in spreading our message to our target audiences.

The GREENGUARD Environmental Institute has also earned credibility through green building programs, codes, and standards, including the U.S. Green Building Council's LEED Building Rating System; the Collaborative for High Performance Schools

(CHPS); GreenGlobes; ASHRAE 189.1; and the International Green Construction Code, which reference our certifications and test methods.

TileDealer: Why have four different certifications evolved?

Black: Increasing awareness about the dangers of chemical exposure, marketplace demand for healthier products, the alarming rise in childhood asthma, and the ongoing introduction of “new” (and unstudied) chemicals into everyday products are the drivers behind our certifications. We started with GREENGUARD Indoor Air Quality Certification in 2001 as a baseline for low chemical emissions. We launched the GREENGUARD Children & SchoolsSM Certification in 2005 to address the unique health needs of children and sensitive populations (like the ill and the elderly); this program is the most difficult, as its standards are extremely high.

Our GREENGUARD Building ConstructionSM Certification was developed to address the issue of mold and moisture problems in built environments, as mold growth can negatively impact indoor air quality.

GREENGUARD PremierSM Certification, currently in its pilot phase, takes a more holistic approach to protecting people from chemical exposure by accounting for both chemical emissions and chemical content, while considering the environment in which the product is used.

TileDealer: What is your feeling about how important GREENGUARD is to the tile and settings material industry? How can tile industry manufacturers, specifiers, distributors, and retailers benefit from knowing more about GREENGUARD?

Black: Tile industry manufacturers can certainly benefit from achieving GREENGUARD Certification because third-party verified low-emitting products are highly sought-after for green building projects. And green building is on the rise. It’s a trend not likely to die down, given the increased concern, particularly in the school, residential, and healthcare industries. Even GREENGUARD Certified tile products that are marketed directly to the end user would have mass market appeal due to

their contribution to healthier indoor environments, a key attribute for discerning, health-conscious consumers (especially new parents); certainly that would have a positive effect on retailers. The GREENGUARD Product GuideSM makes the job of a specifier simpler by allowing him or her to search for products by sustainable credit and Master CSI format.

TileDealer: How many of those products have been certified?

Black: We currently have about 10 tile and tile-associated product manufacturers participating in the program, with products ranging from natural and synthetic stone and ceramics to installation systems like adhesives, grouts, caulks, and floor levelers. These products can help earn more than two dozen sustainable building points.

TileDealer: What is the marketplace impact of GREENGUARD certification?

Black: GREENGUARD Certification fundamentally changes entire industries for the good of human health; that’s the kind of impact that’s powerful. Whenever a manufacturer commits to certifying a product or line of products, that manufacturer is telling the world that it cares about more than just the traditional “bottom line,” but also the “triple bottom line:” people, planet, and profit. Moreover, that manufacturer is raising the bar on healthier indoor environments, not only for the industry in which the manufacturer operates, but also in homes, offices, and classrooms around the globe.

TileDealer: What can you tell us about GREENGUARD’s role in third-party validation of Green Building?

Black: The GREENGUARD Environmental Institute does not certify green buildings, but rather the products and materials that are often used to construct and furnish green buildings. Our certifications are, however, referenced in numerous green building programs and codes, so the use of GREENGUARD Certified products can contribute to earning certain green building points by helping to ensure indoor air quality. ●