

Common Misconceptions

Your product doesn't work that way. I just assumed or I just thought, or how come this can't... Forget it folks. Today we're going to talk about common misconceptions in the green building world, both from anticipating the material arriving to an application, and longevity. So it's going to be a quick episode on misconceptions here on Non Toxic Environments.

Hello folks, welcome back to the show. This is Andy. I am by myself this week. Jay is taking a break and he'll be back with us next week. This episode is a little different. Well I say that every week. I think it's a little different. We try to make them different to make them exciting, interesting for the listeners. This episode is kind of a mishmash of what I will call common misconceptions of the industry. And it's kind of a, you know, misconceptions of how products work, how they are used, how they're sold and received. It's kind of a combination of both material use, availability, and the industry itself. And so in, let me start off with the biggest misconception. I believe, and I'm not gonna spend too much time on this one because, well quite honestly we've, we've talked about this quite a bit before, so I don't need to belabor the point, but the misconception that I have to speak about most often is that zero VOC is equivalent to healthy and safe. Now I will say this, I have to bring this topic up far less than I ever have before. Our show is doing a wonderful job at informing those who are interested in healthier materials, that there is a difference between green and healthy; that there is a difference between zero VOC and zero toxin. And so I believe that the industry, the marketplace is starting to evolve finally in this direction.

When we were in the midst of the green building boom, I'll call it in the mid 2000s. And people were buying product that was considered air quotes "green" just for the sake of being able to tell their neighbors and their family and friends I bought a countertop made of recycled this and recycled that. It was the trendy thing to do as the construction economy shrunk, with the last recession, those available dollars to buy those things obviously shrunk. And as the funds are coming back into the market, people are a lot more concerned about how they're spending those dollars. And, the wise choice is to buy a product that is of course environmentally friendly, but more importantly is healthier for the occupants. There has to be a bigger benefit than just doing the right thing.

And so that misconception of zero VOC is good, is really starting to sort of answer itself. And you're finding that now with even the paint and coating manufacturers starting to change their verbiage. A lot of it has to do with mandates. The paint companies were told... several of them were fined by the FTC in the last couple of years for essentially duping the public about how VOCs are calculated, how they are tested for and if they're actually affecting the user and manufacturers have to by law now change the way they say things. And it's good. It's, it's giving more disclosure and it's being more open and honest to everybody about what the products can and cannot do. The downside though is that there's still this element of it being the wild west out there. And I'll take for instance, something like carpeting.

Carpeting is being sold by many manufacturers now as being zero VOC. And I hate to break it to you folks, but you know, the chemicals that are found in carpeting typically aren't VOCs and haven't been VOCs because they are what are called exempted VOC compounds. So they've never had to be listed. You know, the smell that people refer to as that carpet smell is a chemical called trichloroethylene. And that also makes up part of the styrene butadiene rubber backing; that is actually an unregulated VOC. So it was never actually listed as one before. And so putting zero VOC on a piece of carpet is akin to calling it gluten free or fat free. It really doesn't matter. It still contains the toxins, but they never had been VOCs. So that's the common misconception that I deal with on a regular basis and so I don't need to go into that much further.

Alright. Misconception number two, this is something that I deal with again fairly regularly is, the call or an email from a customer saying I was doing my research and I read on a Facebook group that AFM Safecoat paint peels off the walls, or Benjamin Moore Natura paint peels off the walls or, you know, insert the manufacturer here. So the common misconception here is that just because a paint is considered healthier, safer, lower VOC, green, you name it, that it doesn't actually work as well as the old fashioned toxic stuff. Now, interestingly enough, there are some applications that this would be true. VOCs for what they, they are volatile organic compounds. While some are dangerous to humans, some are completely harmless, but what they usually do when inserted into a coating is give the ability for the paint to bond under duress and under bad situations. It just gives it the ability to be a bit more goof proof. And taking these ingredients out of paints makes it so that you have to be a little more exact in in your application and your preparation. So I get this call a time that says that, you know, I was going

to use Safecoat, but then I read on this Facebook group that Safecoat didn't work for this one person and peeled right off the walls and don't ever use this product. And with a quick 30 seconds of searching, you'll find that just about every paint manufacturer you can think of has been named on some Facebook group, some talk, you know, chat group, for doing the exact same thing. And why is that? Well, it's because people don't want to believe that either their contractor or themselves didn't follow directions or didn't prepare surfaces properly.

They always want to believe that when there's a problem on site that it must've had to do with the product because the product was the only difference. The homeowner can say, listen, I've been painting for 30 years. I don't know how often they paint. Of course, you know, if you're using good product, you'd only, I should have to paint once in that 30 years. But I digress. Let's say they paint every five years and they've always used different brands of paint. And the very last time they painted, they used Safecoat and they had problems. The paint peeled... I can see how if you weren't a professional and if you are interested in and trying to find, you know, the boogeyman on this now that'd be the manufacturer. That must've been something wrong with the paint. And then I get a phone call saying that there's a problem; what happened here? And find out that, well actually the problem was that the last time you painted you didn't wash the walls before you applied paint and now that all paint has to be lower zero VOC in those solvents we've talked about that do certain things, it's a bit more crucial that the walls are washed.

Maybe you're a family that does a lot of cooking and cooking oils and greases can get into the air. And as that smoke from cooking attaches to a wall, it carries with it little droplets of oil. And if you don't wash that off, it's quite possible that if you'd paint over it, the paint would peel off. Or if it's a bathroom, if you didn't wash the walls. Or if it's new dry wall. And you know, the drywall contractor mudded and taped and sanded all the, all the drywall joints but didn't vacuum off properly all the dust from that process, maybe you painted right over dust that isn't actually locked into the wall and therefore the paint just peels off as the dust falls off. There's a myriad of reasons why paint would peel off of the surface. The one thing that's true in just about every situation that happens though is that it's not the paint's fault paint has one job and that is to coalesce, create a film.

Now, if it creates a film on a surface, that's what it really should do. But if that surface is not conducive to adhesion or to bonding, what happens is it's like trying to stick paint to a sheet of

glass. It shrinks and grabs and creates that film, but it's not really bonded to the surface. So if you, if you got an edge and you started peeling it, it would come off like a sheet of dead skin. And that's usually the telltale sign that the surface was not prepared properly. And misconception is that there's something wrong with the paint. And this a problem that every paint manufacturer deals with. It's almost never a problem with a paint. It's a problem with the surface preparation. So I don't want to beat that one and in further than I have.

Let's see, misconception number three for today. This one came up just recently, a client came into the showroom and said, we're looking at buying bamboo floors because they're trying to find the healthiest flooring materials available. This misconception is not something that I hear too often lately because bamboo as a flooring material, it was trendy for awhile and now it's starting to go away from the trend. The trend is going back towards wood; but there's still that feeling out there that if I'm going to do something that's really green for my house that's really ecofriendly and healthy, I'm going to buy bamboo floors. Well, just because it's bamboo does not mean any of those are true. Bamboo is a commodity as a raw material. And you have to really trust the source that it comes from in order to believe and know for sure that it's gonna meet some of those environmental and health benefits you're looking for.

But the fact that it's just bamboo does not mean any of those are just true automatically. So if you're looking for let's say, a very environmentally friendly wood type flooring material, I could probably argue that material that's harvested selectively and delivered down from Northern Wisconsin to Southern Wisconsin is probably more environmentally friendly than a container load of bamboo that's being shipped over from China. And that's where all bamboo is manufactured. I can also say on the flip side that bamboo that is plied together using formaldehyde free adhesives that don't off gas would probably be healthier than wood that's manufactured locally, that uses urea formaldehyde based what glues. So there's a trade off, um, and you have to really look for the products that meet the criteria you're trying to meet. But just, you cannot assume because it's this or that, that it's going to meet that set of criteria. You really have to work with your local supplier and ask the right questions. Again, just because bamboo is considered eco-friendly and healthy doesn't actually mean it is.

All right, the last misconception I want to talk about today is that products that are healthy and eco-friendly just cannot work as well as the old fashioned toxic materials. Now I touched on this

a little bit earlier when talking about VOCs and peeling paints... In certain situations, the old fashioned ingredients that are used for all types of building and home related goods, work better than what's being offered to us now. In some situations. Actually very rarely is this the case. Take into consideration things like exterior paint. The old timers will say you've got to use an oil based primer and oil based paint for exterior wood. Well, there hasn't been an innovation in the oil based paint industry in about 25 years. All research and innovation is going into the waterborne products. Why? Well, because they're healthier, they're safer. And in most cases they actually work better. But the misconception is that you've got to use an oil base in order for it to work.

Another one that we see quite often is the misconception that these green adhesives don't work and the green caulking materials don't work. And I am here to tell you that materials that we get from AFM, from Chemlink, these materials are incredibly good and they work wonderfully well. Matter of fact, I'd put them up against any product on the market for what they're designed to do. And just because they're considered environmentally friendly or healthier does not mean at all that you're going to lose any performance with these materials.

But yet we've got to answer those questions on a regular basis from customers because their contractor said this and their contractor said that. The thing about the industry is that contractors have amazing experience in what they are used to using. And you pay for the good contractors. You paid dearly because they know what they're doing, they can get the job done in a set amount of time. They make the project look great, but they are so strapped for time to do research on new innovations that they almost always just use what they've used before because they know it works. I certainly can't slight them for this; that old saying that time is money and if they're losing time, just doing research and trying out new products, they're losing money. And a lot of these companies they just can't afford to do that.

So, um, they have to trust when a supplier like myself or others across the country are saying, I know it seems like it's not gonna work, but trust me, it'll work. It'll work just fine. And, um, you know, most often they're, they're pleasantly surprised and you hope from this point forward they might consider using healthier, safer materials for their next job.

All right. That is it for the show this week on common misconceptions. Thanks again for joining me and Jay and I would back next week with another episode of Non Toxic Environments. And once again, folks, we'd love it if you'd go to iTunes and hit subscribe, tell your family and friends about this. We are still one of the fastest growing shows in the lineup of podcasts as it relates to healthy homes. Really exciting for us in the home and garden section. We've been consistently about the 20th, the 30th ranked show all of podcasts in North America. So we are extremely, extremely excited about that. And it's all because of you listening to us giving us ideas for future shows. So thanks again for listening everybody and have yourself a wonderful, wonderful weekend. Take care.