



Phasing Out PVC

“I don’t think anyone in the construction business today believes there is a future for PVC.”

-- Eva Mensson, environmental director of SIAB, a leading Swedish construction company

An increasingly wide range of architects, designers, corporations and communities are recognizing the hazards of PVC and the need to eliminate its use.

GOVERNMENT STOPS DIOXIN

Community resolutions have recently been passed in San Francisco and Oakland to support the elimination of dioxin pollution through a wide range of efforts including phasing out the use of PVC and other chlorinated compound products. The Danish government has imposed taxes upon PVC to discourage its use.

MAJOR CORPORATIONS DROP PVC

Heightened attention to the hazards of PVC in recent years in a variety of applications such as packaging, toys and medical supplies has resulted in efforts by a growing number of major corporations to eliminate their use of PVC.

Major corporations that have either switched or pledged to switch from PVC include **Nike** (all products and European HQ building), **GM** and other auto manufacturers, **Ikea** (furniture), **AEG** and **Electrolux** (appliances), **Mattel** (all toys), **Lego** (toys) and **Baxter** International (IV bags), **Kaiser Permanente** (the largest non-profit HMO in the US – gloves), **Tenet** Healthcare (2nd largest for-profit health care company in the US – medical products), **3M** (adhesive), **Visa** (Credit Cards) and **Nippon** Telephone and Telegraph (equipment and cabling).

The dropping of PVC specifications from these applications, along with long-standing concerns about fire hazards (and advanced market pressures coming from Europe where concern has been high for years) have together caused some construction supply manufacturers to proactively switch from PVC to healthier alternatives.

As more brand-name manufacturers switch, their suppliers in the chemicals and plastics industries are investing more in producing alternative resins. In January, for instance, **Cargill Inc.** and **Dow Chemical Co.** said they are ready to launch full scale commercial production of a new kind of "natural plastic" made from plants, such as corn or wheat, instead of petroleum.

BUILDING FIRMS GO PVC FREE

Many firms in European countries have been constructing major projects virtually PVC-free for years now. Major examples include the Chunnel between the UK and France and the Berlin Jewish Children’s Museum. Now increased availability of alternatives and increasing awareness among architects and designers in the U.S., is leading to a growing number of major construction projects here where vinyl has been avoided in favor of other materials because of environmental and other concerns.

- Designers involved in the **US EPA’s** new Washington, DC headquarters avoided vinyl wall coverings and flooring in favor of superior alternatives.

Virtually everything but the carpet backing will be PVC-free when the project is completed in 2002.

- **HEB**, the largest grocery chain in Texas, is eliminating vinyl composition tile in its new stores.
- The new **Houston Nursing and Biomedical Sciences Center** for the University of Texas, Houston, is committed to non-PVC product specifications.
- The **U.S. Navy** has eliminated the use of PVC cabling in its vessels, as did the **New York City Transit Authority** and other train systems around the world.

PVC OUT OF THE OLYMPICS

At the Olympics 2000 Village in Sydney Australia, the Olympic Co-ordination Authority committed to minimizing the use of PVC wherever alternatives are available and cost competitive.

The builders of the Olympic Athlete's Village managed to reduce PVC use by 80% compared to a regular housing development. Much of the remaining 20% which remains is a result of Government and Health regulations which only specify PVC for use.

If not for these outdated regulations, virtually all of the PVC in the Village could have been eliminated.

Other Olympic venues throughout the games site have also minimized or avoided PVC altogether. Examples include:

Hotel: PVC has been eliminated from all electrical services: light and power cabling, including submains; general communication and computer cabling; wet area flooring; hydraulic services (cold and hot water systems, reclaimed water reticulation, in-ground sanitary drainage and in-ground stormwater drainage);

Multi-Use Arena: plumbing stacks and downpipes, seating, floor and wall finishes;

Showgrounds: 14 kilometres of polyethylene piping has been used instead of PVC for main trunk services, PVC eliminated from all above ground piping, PVC alternative used for fabric shade structures;

Olympic Stadium: No PVC used in plumbing and seating, PVC minimized in cabling and alternatives used for main arch shade membrane.

(January 2000)