



January 10, 2008

PROJECT INITIATION AND NOTIFICATION: New Green Seal Environmental Standard for Plastic Resin Film Bags (GS-45)

Green Seal™ is proposing the development of a new environmental standard for plastic resin film bags. (*Proposed Title: Green Seal Environmental Standard for Plastic Resin Film Bags GS-45*). Green Seal is an independent non-profit organization established in 1989 devoted to promoting environmental sustainability through environmental standard-setting, product certification, and public education. The intent of Green Seal's standards is to reduce, to the extent technically and economically feasible, the environmental impacts associated with the manufacture, use, and disposal of products.

The scope of this project is intended to be for instances for where reusable bags are not feasible and disposal of plastic resin film bags are appropriate such as trash can liners or pet and yard waste bags. It will likely exclude general retail and shopping bags as those functions can be addressed by a reusable bag option. The scope will likely exclude food-contact bags such as sandwich bags or take-out or carry-out bags from food retailers as food packaging may have additional considerations and may be better addressed in a separate Green Seal standard. The new standard is anticipated to include a scope, definitions, product performance, product health and environmental, end-of-life management, and packaging and labeling section and criteria.

The purpose of developing this new standard is to address issues of plastic refuse bags as the garbage bag industry is a \$1.3 billion industry. Single-use plastic bags cause concern due to dangers to ocean wildlife, visible litter, clogging of waterways, spreading of disease and landfill space demand. Some 80-100 billion single-use plastic bags are estimated to be consumed annually in the U.S., with 500 billion to 1 trillion bags used worldwide per year. Internationally, several countries have either established a plastic bag ban or enforce a tax on single-use plastic bags. In March 2007, San Francisco became the first city in United States to ban plastic bags. The Plastic Bag Reduction Ordinance prohibits the distribution of single-use plastic bags in favor of reusable bags, compostable or paper bags. Other cities and counties are reportedly looking to issue a similar ban such as Annapolis, Boston, Baltimore, Los Angeles County, Louisville, Portland, Portland, Santa Cruz and Seattle. While reusable bags are the preferred option for replacing many functions of single-use plastic bag, there are instances where a reusable bag is not practically feasible as a replacement such as a trash can liner or pet and yard waste. This standard is intended to provide guidance for these instances when a reusable bag is not feasible.

Several environmental procurement specifications, including the U.S. Department of Interior, U.S. Environmental Protection Agency Procurement Guidelines, the State of California, King County, Twin Cities and the State of Ohio in addition to U.S. Green Building Council LEED and other Green Seal standards including the Environmental Standard for Cleaning Service (GS-42), specify trash can liners requiring varying degrees of recycled content. Compostable plastics are a small portion of the overall plastics market (biodegradable bags were reported to be less than 1% of the market), but are expected to increase, with up to 500% estimated annual growth during the next 5 years. Several other international eco-labels have developed standards for plastic resin including Canada, Germany, Australia, Hong Kong, Korea and Japan. The new Green Seal standard may potentially include criteria to similar to these international standards including performance criteria, % recycled content, requirements for biodegradability or recyclability, plastic resin code labeling, hazardous additives and a restriction on waste and energy consumption with production.

While many functions of single-use plastic bags can be addressed with a reusable bag option, there are instances where replacement with a reusable bag is not feasible option. The purpose of this standard is to provide clarification on which plastic resin film bags are environmental leaders for those needs, with a focus mainly on trash can liners or pet and refuse bags. The Green Seal standard also hopes to assist consumers, retailers and government specifiers in purchasing decisions based on a life-cycle based assessment when a reusable bags is not feasible and disposal of plastic resin film bag is appropriate.

Project Plan:

The development of this new standard will be led by Green Seal staff, with input from stakeholders through the process. The project is anticipated to have the following steps:

1. Scoping of Revisions (with stakeholder input) – Beginning in January 2008
2. Review of Proposed Standard (by public)
3. Review of Draft Final Standard (by registered stakeholders)
4. Issued Standard

Registration of stakeholders will be done until the end of the public comment period on the proposed revised standard. This process is done to enable access to the draft final revised standard. *If you submit comments through another party, such as a trade association, you will still need to register yourself in order to receive information and review the draft final revised standard.* Registration is open to all interested parties.

Information about this product, including registration information, is available on the following project site: http://www.greenseal.org/certification/gs45_film_bags.cfm

Additional information can be found at www.greenseal.org

References:

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