



January 10, 2008

PROJECT INITIATION AND NOTIFICATION: Revision of Environmental Standard for Reusable Bags (GS-16)

Green Seal™ is proposing the revision of its environmental leadership standards for reusable bags. 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 purpose of revising GS-16 is to update the standard to make it more comprehensive and pertinent to the current marketplace. Since the standard was issued in January 1994, reusable bags have increased exponentially both in volume and types that are commercially available. In addition, other environmental and social issues have arisen that were not covered by the original standard that are necessary to include to establish leadership for the reusable bag product category. The scope of this project is intended to address replacement of single-use plastic bags at grocery stores, retail pharmacies or general retailers, usually referred to as grocery or retail bags. Other types of reusable bags anticipated to be included within the product category include as produce bags, lunch bags, bank security or deposit bags, postal bags, dry cleaning bags, garment bags or other function of single-use plastic bag that can be addressed by a reusable option.

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 grocery stores and retail pharmacies 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. With the increased movement to reduce single-use plastic bags use due to associated issues, reusable bags are increasingly used to meet the demands. Numerous grocery stores nationwide are encouraging the use of reusable bags such as Whole Foods, Save Mart, Kroger, Safeway, Giant Eagle, Pathmark, Publix, Albertson's, Wegmans, Save-a-Lot, Tops Market, Trader Joes, D'Agostino and Giant by selling their own reusable bags and/or giving a rebate for customers who bring in their own bags. Stop & Shop, New England's largest food retailer, began selling reusable bags and less than a year later had given away or sold 1.3 million bags.

With the rapid growth and high consumer demand, an environmental label could provide clarity on which products are environmental leaders and assist consumers and retailers in purchasing decisions. A life-cycle assessment by the Australian Department of Environmental and Water Resources examined single-use plastic bags and common alternatives in terms of material consumption, contribution and persistence as litter, carbon dioxide emissions and primary energy use. The report concluded that smaller woven high-density polyethylene (HDPE) bags and polypropylene (PP) carry-boxes were the preferred option; however, the report did not include social and environmental impacts with production and transport or end-of-life disposal. The revision of the standard is anticipated to include similar aspects of material consumption including material source, both virgin and recycled-content and encompassing other environmental impacts surrounding raw material production, such as pesticide-use with cotton. Other criteria anticipated to be included are social and environmental impacts, such as labor practices and applicable environmental regulations as well as take into account life-cycle considerations such as environmental impacts of transport and distribution, product performance criteria and end-of-life management (disposal).

Project Plan:

The development of the revised 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 Revised Standard (by public)
3. Review of on Draft Final Revised 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/g16_reusable_bags.cfm

Additional information can be found at www.greenseal.org

References:

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