

SPECIAL REPORT

2012 Forecast

ERA helps roofing industry prep for VOC regs

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BETHESDA, Md.—The start of the new year marked an important date for many commercial roofers that significantly will impact how their jobs are completed.

In November, the EPDM Roofing Association, as part of its advocacy work on the issue of volatile organic compound regulations, announced its ongoing monitoring of the countdown to the Jan. 1 full implementation of VOC regulations in key Northeast and Mid-Atlantic states. Much of this advocacy work has been ongoing for the past two years, as many of these regulations were foreshadowed by advocacy groups.

The impact is most significant on roofing contractors that are required to utilize adhesives, sealants and primers that can't exceed 250 grams per liter of VOC. However the laws in each state could be slightly different, and contractors who complete roofing projects in more than one state have to understand what those rules are, said John Geary, vice president of manufacturing for Firestone Building Products Co. L.L.C.

"Many states agreed on a transitional period over the last couple of years in which they would not use these volatile compounds for a period of time," he said. "What the older adhesives, sealants and primers bring is potential health and environmental concerns so there is a need for alternative products in the marketplace."

One of the challenges for roofers is that those alternative products come with a much higher expense, up to double the cost of older sealants, adhesives and primers, said Scott Long, product manager for the Bethesda-based EPDM Roofing Association.

However, both Long and Geary said that while the cost of those products may be double, that doesn't mean the cost of the overall project is double be-

percentage of a total job.

California model

Volatile organic compounds found in adhesives and sealants used by the roofing industry are regulated because high levels of emission of VOCs may contribute to the formation of ground-level ozone. As part of the effort to achieve federally mandated standards in the Northeast and Mid-Atlantic, the Ozone Transport Commission developed a Model Rule for Adhesives and Sealants.

This model was based on regulations used in California and incorporated provisions that were effective primarily in the climactic and market conditions of that state. Since the initial release of these model regulations, the ERA has supported fair and reasonable efforts to reduce VOC emissions.

"They essentially took exactly what California had in place and replicated it," Long said. "The newer products are formulated with the proper solvents to make them safer and more environmentally friendly. It's the same chemistry (to make the products) but the solvent is different."

Among the newer product features offered by Firestone are both water- and solvent-based products. Within one of the water-based products is a pink tint that dissipates when the adhesive is ready for final use, Geary said.

"These alternative types of solvents come with lower VOCs, yet the solvent is made (in an identical way) and it can create, for example, more standard bonding adhesives," Geary said.

One thing contractors must make their clients aware of is that these low-VOC products often come with a distinct odor that would be unfamiliar to them, Long said. Also these newer products don't flash as quickly as before, although they generally do offer the same coverage rates

Information campaign

differ significantly from those in the Northeast and Mid-Atlantic, the ERA began an intensive campaign to inform individual state regulators of these differences and to ask for modifications in the regulations.

Based on these concerns raised by the ERA, several states incorporated a seasonal implementation schedule into draft regulations, and others have drafted language to incorporate a seasonal implementation schedule into their final regulations. These changes have allowed sufficient time to test and phase in new low-VOC materials, make process changes to meet the new standards, and train state contractors.

The ERA has been one of the advocates for these changes, Long said, and is one of the few organizations that have lobbied at both the state and federal levels for these new regulations.

"These are a set of regulations that impact hundreds of products in various industries," Long said. "But we've tried to help the roofing industry take center stage. We've brought a high level of awareness to the issue already."

Geary believes that continued communication about these regulations needs to occur. Firestone has sent out information to its customers about the required

changes through various communications channels but clarification of the laws may still be unclear.

"Compliance is a major issue. We're changing the labeling on our products and making it very clear what our products are and how they comply with these regulations," Geary said. "We're taking it very seriously."

One of the reasons is that some contractors may either purposely choose to not follow the state-mandated guidelines, or may somehow still be unaware of them. "We've seen some of the mentality where roofers may look the other way the past two years as we ramped up these efforts," Long said. "It's always an issue, but states from Virginia north have had some regulations in place for the past couple of years, and distributors and sales representatives should have a very clear understanding of the timing of these regulations and what they mean."

While Massachusetts, Vermont and New Hampshire are still considering their approach to VOC regulation, the roofing industry was required to be fully compliant with the new regulations by Jan. 1 in Maine, Connecticut, Delaware, Maryland, New Jersey, New York, Pennsylvania and Rhode Island.



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