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Green movement is in full force at '08 show

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PLASTICS NEWS STAFF

CHICAGO — Green has been a buzzword in all consumer products categories for a while. But plastic products took a big step toward the eco-friendly trend at this year's International Home & Housewares Show in Chicago, with a group debut of new materials, new designs and new applications.



Daniels

Here is a rundown of the sustainable plastic products unveiled at the March 16-18 show, with many claiming to be "the first."

Trash bags

Perf Go Green Inc. of New York touted itself as the first to mass-market 100 percent biodegradable trash bags to consumers. The products launched at the show included 16-gallon kitchen trash bags, 33-gallon lawn and leaf bags, plastic drop cloths, commercial trash bags and kitty litter bags in three sizes. All are made of post-consumer polyolefins with oxo-biodegradable additives, according to Linda Daniels, chief marketing officer.

The green-tinted low density polyethylene bags have a shelf life of two years and will completely break down in a landfill in 12-24 months.

A partner and shareholder of Perf Go Green, Spectrum Plastics

Inc. of Cerritos, Calif., manufactures the biodegradable bags.

To go with the handle-tie trash bags, Perf Go Green also offers a unique dispensing system that's stored in the bottom of a trash can and dispenses bags one after another.



Tracy

"They pop up like tissues," Daniels said, showcasing the mechanism.

Daniels said she believes that consumers are willing to pay "a few pennies more per bag" to save the planet.

Tony Tracy, chairman of Perf Go Green, said the company is starting with 58 major and specialty retailers and drugstores in North America, but hopes to take the products worldwide eventually.

Tracy, a former actor and a designer with 15 patents of household products, hopes to expand the biodegradable line to diapers and straws.

Carrier bags

Another company, Nashville Wraps Inc. of Hendersonville, Tenn., reported warm market response to its new line of high density PE translucent gift bags that are made of a combination of post-consumer and post-industrial content. A degradable additive also can be added.

"We didn't realize it until the market responded," Lauren Marlin said at the show. She said this particular new line has sold more than any other category. "We also



Plastics News photos by Nina Ying Sun

Going green: Clockwise from top left, Umbra's biodegradable trash bins; A&T International's biodegradable tableware; Bissell Homecare's Little Green compact, multipurpose cleaner, which has components made from 100 percent post-consumer plastic; and Design Ideas' EcoGen bath products.

noticed customers prefer the green color scheme to the alternative pink color," she said.

One of the reasons these eco-friendly bags are selling so well is the competitive pricing, according to Marlin. "They are actually a little cheaper than bags made of virgin HDPE," she said.

Nashville Wraps sources the sustainable packaging products from vendors in the United States, she said.

Bath and Office supplies

If you think the feature of biodegradability is only good for disposable and short-life products, you need to think again.

Companies are getting ahead of the bioresin trend and are using biodegradables in a broader range of household products.

Design Ideas Ltd. of Springfield, Ill., launched a line of bath products made of EcoGen plastic, a copolymer known as polyhydroxy-

butyrate valerate, or PHBV. The line features a bath cup, pump bottle, soap dish, toothbrush holder and waste can, and initially will be available at the Container Store.

The company said the products will break down in six to 10 months in a residential composting facility, and are priced "right on par with everything else."

"We are the first design company to utilize EcoGen plastic in the production of decorative home goods," said Andy Van Meter, Design Ideas president. "We've listened to our consumers and, more and more, they are conscious of their purchase decisions' impact on the environment."

Also displayed at the company's booth were prototype office supplies made of PHBV. Both the bath line and the office line are designed by professor Hans Maier-Aichen, a design teacher at Germany's Karlsruhe University of Arts and Design. Maier-Aichen also is an award-winning plastics designer.

The products can withstand temperatures of 230° F and will last indefinitely under normal conditions, Design Ideas said.

Design Ideas buys PHBV from China's Tianan Biologic Material Co. Ltd., based in Ningbo. Jim Lunt, Tianan vice president of sales and marketing, is a key figure for Design Ideas' EcoGen products. Lunt also was a founding member of Minnetonka, Minn.-based NatureWorks LLC.

Design Ideas is one of the largest clients of Tianan, which currently is capable of making

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Housewares industry finding boon in green

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44.1 million pounds of PHBV a year, Van Meter said.

The products are injection molded by vendors in China.

Umbr Ltd. of Toronto showcased desktop organizers injection molded with polylactic acid. David Quan, designer of the product, said PLA's price remains a hurdle to commercializing household products.

Umbr's products are made by contractors in the United States and Canada.

Decorative tableware

Hong Kong firm A&T International Co. also is testing waters for green housewares. The company's factory in Heyuan, China, makes biodegradable tableware and bags with a variety of materials including PHBV, a mix of 60 percent PP and 40 percent starch and natural materials such as bamboo and sugar cane.

"We don't use melamine in the natural-fiber products, because it doesn't break down that easily. We use organic chemicals instead," said A&T Managing Director Tony Lo.

Despite China's huge demand for biodegradable food and beverage serving trays and cutlery, A&T said its focus is not on those disposable products. "Our target is department stores," Lo said.

The firm hopes consumers will

buy natural-material products that have comparable looks to traditional china and stoneware.

The company estimates its 2008 sales of biodegradable products will reach \$5 million. It also plans to phase out the production of conventional plastic products in the next couple of years.

Kitchenware

Casabella Holdings LLC of Blauvelt, N.Y., launched a line of dish drains, cutlery trays and soap dishes made of PLA. The products are thick enough, so "they are not disposable," said Laurence Weinstein, vice president of international business development.

The products are competitively priced and sourced from China, he said.

Trash cans

Base Brands, headquartered in Atlanta, named one family of sustainable products Reduce, including a trash can that can contain much more trash than a similarly sized can. The trick is a compactor between the lid and the bin body. The compactor is made of ABS and silicone. The company also sells recycle bins made of recycled PP and trash cans with integrated shredders.

The 3-year-old company contracts manufacturing out to vendors in mainland China and Taiwan, President Ken Kreadle said.

international
home+housewares
show 2008

The products are patented in the U.S. and China.

Kreadle said the goal is to increase the share of green products in company sales from about 5 percent right now to more than 30 percent.

Umbr uses industrial scrap PP, plus 1-2 percent additives, to make trash bins. "Theoretically they will degrade in less than 50 years in landfill conditions," said Umbr's Quan.

Sustainable products don't have to look boring, he stressed. The Umbr biodegradable trash bins feature the appearance of wood-grain and metallic surfaces.

"Since we use scrap PP, there is no cost increase," Quan said.

Beverage containers

Base Brands' new water bottles are made from a styrene acrylonitrile copolymer and prominently labeled "BPA-free," since the product is not made of polycarbonate and does not contain bisphenol A. But the company promotes the message that people can use these colorful and attractive bottles to bring beverages from home to work, instead

of consuming bottled water from vending machines. The SAN bottles come in packs of five, with an easy-slide base for refrigerators.

Another firm at the show, Aladdin, celebrated its 100th anniversary and launched its newest collection, Sustain by Aladdin. The firm's first products are tumblers made of food-grade recycled PP. Aladdin spent years developing the trademarked food-grade recycled materials, said Carol Schreitmueller, director of research and development.

The company's mugs are priced within the typical range, even though the raw material is more expensive than virgin resin.

Also in the Sustain line are bottles made of Eastman Chemical Co.'s Tritan-brand specialty copolyester, which the company also touts as being free of BPA.

Aladdin is a unit of privately held Pacific Market International of Seattle.

Floor care

Dirt Devil, a brand owned by TTI Floor Care North America of Glenwillow, Ohio, unveiled the industry's first cordless vacuums to receive the U.S. government's Energy Star label: the Dirt Devil AccuCharge hand and stick vacuums.

Both products charge twice as fast, use 70 percent less energy and have extended battery life, the

company said at the show. With no constant flow of power, the battery does not degrade like it does in typical rechargeable products so the suction power and effective running time last longer.

Family-owned floor-care manufacturer Bissell Homecare Inc. also is riding the green wave with its new Little Green compact, multipurpose cleaner. The brush block and parts of the solution tank are made from 100 percent post-consumer plastic. Specifically, the brush block and float are made of ABS and the hose of ethylene vinyl acetate, the company said.

Bissell's goal is to make the product from 75 percent recycled materials by the end of 2008.

Iowa company Harper Brush Works Inc., of Fairfield, introduced desk mops with parts made from recycled beverage bottles.

"I think the green movement is here to stay, Harper Brush CEO and President Barry Harper said in a release.

Other

BRK Brands Inc. of Aurora, Ill., a fully owned subsidiary of Jarden Corp of Rye, N.Y., announced that it is phasing out PVC in its packaging and using recycled PET instead for its First Alert line of smoke and carbon-monoxide alarms.