

## **New Guideline Promotes Truthful Environmental Labelling**

The marketplace has seen an explosion in recent years of products that claim to be “green” or less harmful to the environment in some way. In 1989, 24 products in the U.S. claimed to be green; by 1990, there were over 600 products; by 1994, green products are expected to be an \$8.8 billion business.

But can we always understand or trust the information found on the labels of such products? What, for example, are we to make of catch-all claims such as “environmentally friendly” or “non-polluting”? And is it worth stating that a bottle is “recyclable” if collection or drop-off facilities for recycling are not available in the community where the product is sold?

### **Marketplace Confusion**

Claims that seem to be specific and based on facts may also prove to be misleading. The statement “contains no CFCs” [chlorofluorocarbons] may appear on a product that is forbidden by law to contain CFCs. Or a claim may be trivial in relation to a product’s overall environmental impact. For example, a household cleaning product with a high proportion of toxic, nonbiodegradable ingredients and a small percentage of biodegradable surfactant may carry a label stating that it is “made with biodegradable surfactants”.

Such vague and misleading labelling tends to breed cynicism among consumers. Many consumers who would like to support environmentally responsible products may turn a blind eye to all environmental claims, including the responsible ones. This lack of support may in turn discourage manufacturers from investing in the design and development of new or environmentally improved products.

### **A Tool for Both Industry and Consumers**

CSA has recently published a *Guideline on Environmental Labelling (Z761-93)* that takes aim at clearing up this marketplace confusion. This Guideline is one in a series of voluntary guidelines on environmental management that are being developed by CSA with the participation of representatives from industry, government, and the public. The purpose of

the Z761 Guideline is to help manufacturers and advertisers make honest and credible environmental claims and so encourage consumers to keep the environment in mind when they shop. This in turn will stimulate the development of more products that are less damaging to the environment. In the long run, this will help reduce the environmental burdens and impacts associated with the consumption of goods.

The Guideline deals with the presentation of environmental claims on product and package labels. It provides definitions and rules for the use of specific terms (such as “recyclable”, “reusable/refillable”, “compostable” and “degradable”); symbols such as the “chasing arrows” or Mobius Loop associated with recycling are also covered. The Guideline lists as well sources of test methods that can be used to verify environmental claims. This list includes CSA standards that provide procedures for determining levels of water and energy efficiency.

### **Beyond Minimum Compliance with the Law**

The CSA Guideline goes a step beyond an earlier document, *Guiding Principles for Environmental Labelling and Advertising*. This document was developed by Consumer and Corporate Affairs Canada (now a part of Industry Canada) as a guide to complying with federal laws governing misleading advertising and labelling. While the CSA Guideline is harmonized with this document, it is concerned to give more precise instruction to companies who want to achieve more than minimum compliance with the law. To that end, the Guideline gives more detail on specific types of environmental claims, such as degradability and resource conservation (i.e., water and energy use). By listing test methods, it also steers manufacturers towards substantiating environmental claims scientifically.

A further aim is to promote uniformity in environmental labelling to assist consumers.

“The CSA Guideline helps users supply more detail on their labels and present information in a uniform format,” explains Jenny Hillard, a Consumer and Environmental Consultant and a former Provincial President of the Consumers’ Association of Canada. “This will allow consumers who take the trouble to educate themselves a little on environmental

matters to understand what an environmental claim means.”

### **Dos and Don'ts of Environmental Labelling**

The following are examples of the advice found in CSA's *Guideline on Environmental Labelling*.

- **General Claims:** Claims that broadly imply that a product is beneficial or benign to the environment should not be used. This applies to claims such as “environmentally safe”, “environmentally friendly”, “earth friendly”, “non-polluting”, and “green”.
- **Truthful and Specific Information:** Claims should avoid exaggerating the extent of the environmental impact reduction achieved by a particular product characteristic or the product as a whole. The information provided should specify the precise nature of the impact reduction. If, for example, a manufacturer has eliminated the use of an ozone-damaging substance such as trichloroethane, the label may say “contains no trichloroethane”. But this fact alone does not justify making the broader claim that the product “does not damage the ozone layer”.
- **Clear and Unambiguous Claims:** It should be clear whether a claim applies only to the product or only to the packaging.
- **Recyclability:** Claims must be relevant to the geographic region in which a product is sold. The unqualified claim “recyclable” should only be made where recycling facilities are available to 100 per cent of the community in which the product is marketed. A qualified claim, “recyclable where facilities exist”, is acceptable, but only if recycling facilities are available to a reasonable percentage of the population. The Z761 Guideline adopts the level of 33 per cent set by the National Packaging Coalition Task Force.
- **Degradability:** The claim of degradability should not be made if the product is likely to end up in a landfill site where the conditions are not conducive to degradation.
- **Verification of Claims:** Claims must be verifiable. Claims should be substantiated by

objectively conducted and widely accepted tests, research, and/or analysis.

### **Reasons to Shop with the Environment in Mind**

If you're in any doubt about the need to choose products with reduced packaging or other characteristics that spare the earth's resources, ponder these striking statistics:

- Canada is the world's biggest generator of waste per capita, beating out the U.S., the U.K., West Germany, Japan and the Netherlands.
- Each Canadian produces 1.7 kilograms (about 4 pounds) of garbage per day, which adds up to nearly a tonne a year. A convoy of garbage trucks carrying the country's annual waste would stretch bumper-to-bumper from the Atlantic to the Pacific.
- The amount of waste paper dumped every day worldwide would fill 550 supertankers.
- An estimated 2,800,000,000 trees are felled each year around the world.

### Residential Garage Door Openers

#### **Follow the Instruction Manual to Ensure your Family's Safety**

"Read the instruction manual" is sound advice for users of all types of electrical equipment. If you own a garage door operator (which is often called "an automatic garage door opener"), this advice is especially important. Since a garage door is the largest moving part in your home, a garage door controlled by a door operator exerts a powerful force. This force can prove deadly if a person is struck or trapped by a closing door. Proper installation, operation, and maintenance of the door and door operator are essential.

Here are some precautions you should take to guard against potential hazards.

- Read and follow all safety, maintenance, and testing instructions in your owner's manual. If you don't have one, contact the manufacturer of the door operator for a copy of the manual that applies to your particular model.
- Attach the warning labels that come with your unit as directed, next to the wall control and on the inside of the garage door.
- Operate the remote control only when the garage door is in your line of vision and there are no people or objects around it. If you have a solid, one-piece door that swings out when it opens and you are operating the pushbutton wall control inside your garage, take particular care to ensure that no one is standing outside the garage in the path of the opening door.
- No one, child or adult alike, should stand or walk in the path of a moving door.
- Test the door and door operator following the procedures provided in your instruction manual. Generally, manuals advise testing the auto-reverse safety mechanism once a month or after any repairs or adjustments have been made.
- Keep garage doors properly balanced. A properly balanced door, along with the door operator, exerts as little as 30 pounds of force when the door closes, while one that is not balanced can exert up to 250 pounds of force. Bear in mind that if a door does not reverse readily, the force setting of the door operator may be set too high. People sometimes crank up the force setting to compensate for a sticky or unbalanced door, or to accommodate seasonal conditions such as snow and ice that build up beneath the door. This can be a dangerous practice. While increasing the force may prevent premature reversing, it will also impair or prevent the functioning of the auto-reverse protection feature. A qualified person should adjust the force sensitivity according to the door operator instruction manual.

**Teach Children Not to Play “Beat the Door”**

- Explain to children how dangerous it is to try to slip under the door when it is closing. Never let children operate or play with the door operator's remote controls. The remote control should be kept out of the reach of children. As specified in the CSA standard described below, the pushbutton wall control should also be located out of the reach of small children, at a minimum height of 1.53 metres (5 feet), and away from all moving parts.
- Be sure you know where the emergency release mechanism is and how to use it.
- Examine the garage door springs, cables, rollers, pulleys, and other door hardware periodically. If you spot signs of wear, don't attempt to fix these parts yourself, but have a qualified service person make repairs.
- Lubricate the rollers and hinges of the garage door periodically according to the instructions in your manual.

### **New Safety Devices Boost Entrapment Protection**

Since 1984, garage door operators sold in Canada have been required to have a mechanism that causes the door to reverse direction automatically within two seconds of striking an object in its path. Alternatively, the construction can be such that continuous pressure on a control is required to lower the door: i.e., a person would have to maintain a constant pressure on the control to get the door to close. In 1989, a further test was added to ensure that the door would retract readily if it were to become jammed; once the button is pushed to close the door, the unit must automatically reverse if it does not reach the bottom of its travel within 30 seconds.

As of January 31, 1994, all residential garage door operators certified by CSA must meet the safety requirements of the CSA standard, *Operators and Systems of Doors, Gates, Draperies, and Louvres* (CAN/CSA-C22.2 No. 247-92). Besides covering residential garage door operators, this standard provides requirements for commercial vehicular automatic doors and complete doors, gates and other assemblies that include electrically powered opening and closing devices.

This standard adds a new requirement for such units to have a photoelectric (infrared)

sensor that automatically causes the door to open if the photocell beam is broken. A child or animal trying to duck under the door as it comes down, for example, will break the beam, and the door will be raised automatically. If something or someone is in the path of the door when the control button is pushed, the door will not even start to move downward. Alternatively, units may be equipped with a door edge sensor, similar to those found in elevators, which cause the door to retract immediately on contact with an obstruction.

These new devices do not replace the earlier requirement for the auto-reverse mechanism; they become the primary safety mechanisms for sensing obstructions, while the older automatic reversal system serves as a backup.

Homeowners should definitely replace a garage door operator that lacks the basic auto-reverse safety feature. If you have a unit with the auto-reverse feature, you may want to consider purchasing a photoelectric or door edge sensor that can be added as an accessory safety device to your existing system. Check with a garage door operator dealer or manufacturer for further information.

### **More Safety Tips for Garages and Driveways**

- Keep all chemicals and paints tightly sealed.
- If you have young children, make sure harmful chemicals and tools are stored out of their reach, on a high shelf or in a locked box or cupboard. Garden equipment can be concealed with a heavy tarp, and ignition keys to power lawnmowers should be kept in a safe place. You may also want to consider purchasing special locks that are available to prevent power tools such as drills and saws and electric lawnmowers from being plugged in.
- As part of your spring cleaning, it's a good idea to check garages and tool sheds for old cleaning products, paints, and pesticides. Since these items are hazardous to the environment,

call your municipality or local recycling council to find out how to dispose of these products.

### **Driveways**

- Before backing out of the garage, always check to see that there are no children or children's toys in the driveway or under the car.
- Lock your car doors when parked to prevent children from playing in the car.
- Keep the driveway free of oil, antifreeze, and gasoline spots.

### **Consumer News & Views**

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The United Nations has declared 1994 the "Year of the Family". CSA contributes to the safety and well-being of families daily through its standards development and certification and testing programs.

### **CSA Programs Support Year of the Family**

CSA has produced standards in a number of fields; related certification programs for many of these standards have led to the CSA Mark appearing on a wide variety of products that you may purchase. Some CSA standards development areas that have an impact on the family include:

- Health Care Technology (e.g., recloseable child resistant packages);
- Environmental Technology (e.g., Guideline on Environmental Labelling);
- Sports and Recreational Equipment (e.g., cycling helmets and children's playspaces and



equipment);

- Electrical/Electronics (e.g., consumer products/appliances);
- Construction (e.g., plumbing products);
- Energy (e.g., heat pumps); and
- Transportation (e.g., school buses).

### **Share Your Experience**

CSA operates not only in Canada but internationally as well, and we have readers of this publication in many countries. If any readers have experienced problems with consumer products such as electrical and sports equipment, please let us know details about the product and nature of the problem. Please write to us at the address at the end of this article. Thank you in advance for your help!

### **International Consumer Product Health and Safety**

The new International Consumer Product Health and Safety Organization provides a forum for the sharing of information between product safety professionals worldwide. This organization will focus on fostering uniformity/harmony in aspects of product regulation; the electronic exchange of consumer product data; public awareness of injury prevention; the communication to consumers of information about the proper use of products; and cooperation in identifying emerging safety issues.

### **Consumer Product Safety and CSA Advisory Panel Recommendations**

CSA's five volunteer Advisory Panels provide regional end-user input to standards and other CSA activities, and their efforts assist in improving product safety.

CSA Advisory Panels recently discussed consumer product safety and recommended universal uniformity in classifying and coding product-related injuries. It was felt that a standard classification system for product and related injury data collection would make it easier to identify the causes of injuries and develop potential solutions.

Another Panel discussed plumbing standards at its recent meeting and adopted many

recommendations in the areas of health, water conservation, performance, and users with special needs.

The Winnipeg Panel provided input to CSA's *Guideline on Office Ergonomics*, which is being updated. The Panel requested the following: that the Guideline include a comprehensive chapter on repetitive strain injuries (RSI); that, where appropriate, the most stringent components of standards be adopted during the harmonization of standards with those of other countries or with international guidelines to ensure better protection for all workers; and that all sections of the Guideline stress the need for employee involvement in addressing ergonomics issues and solutions.

### **Instruction Manuals**

In our previous issue (Winter 1993) we included a survey to request information about your experiences with product instruction manuals for users. We would like to thank everyone who responded. Preliminary results indicate that many consumers have problems understanding the manuals: instructions are needed that are more user-friendly, readable, written in plain language, and furnished with clear examples of assembly, parts, etc.

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