



Ask Billy

“VOC-compliant” and “low VOC” explained

Dear Billy,

I live in an area that has just adopted the new VOC regulations for adhesives and sealants. With all these new regulations – plus the growing popularity of “green building” – I’m seeing products that claim “VOC-compliant” and some labeled “low VOC.” What is the difference, if any?

Signed: What The VOC?

Dear Dear What The VOC,

Before I go into the difference between “VOC-compliant” and “low VOC” – and there most certainly is a difference – let’s take a step back for those readers who are not very VOC-savvy.

“VOC” stands for Volatile Organic Compound, a necessary substance used in the manufacture of adhesives and sealants to make them flowable and workable. Once the adhesive or sealant is applied, it cures by the evaporation of the VOC. Some commonly used VOCs are the mineral spirits, toluene and xylene. Gasoline and alcohol are VOCs, too.

When an adhesive or sealant cures, the evaporation process releases substances into the air, which is why you smell an odor as the curing happens. Many states have implemented laws that restrict the use of certain VOCs, which are believed to contribute to low-level smog and deplete the ozone. Adhesives and sealants labeled “VOC-compliant” have been reformulated to comply with these laws. That can mean two things: The product is made with exempt VOCs, and it is made with a lower total volume of VOCs altogether. VOC-compliant products have less of an impact upon the environment and

exactly meet the requirements of these laws that are on the books in nine states and pending in 10 others.

Sounds good, right? It is, unless your customer wants a green product or you’re striving to conform to the latest green building standards. If that’s the case, you need to use “low VOC” adhesives and sealants, which will have the least impact on indoor air quality. These products – such as OSI® GreenSeries™ adhesives, sealants, and caulks – strive to reduce the total VOC content. They are even better for the environment and are good for environmentally-sensitive people (such as those with asthma). Low VOC products cost more, but they also conform to more stringent standards while maintaining high performance.

Another tip: Look for third-party testing to make sure the manufacturer’s claims have been independently verified. For example, OSI® GreenSeries™ adhesives and sealants are GREENGUARD-certified for indoor air quality, the only adhesives and sealants on the market with that designation. I advise you, What The VOC, to consult closely with your customers about which product is right for them. If they are concerned about their budget, then VOC-compliant adhesives and sealants will comply with the laws and reduce environmental impact. If indoor air quality and “going green” is a more important issue for them, stock up on low VOC products. In either case, you are now ready to knowledgeably discuss both options with your customers.

Stickin’ with you on the job,

Billy

Got a question for Billy?
Email him at Bill.Longo@us.henkel.com.

Bill Longo is

Henkel’s go-to guy

for caulks, sealants,

and adhesives. While

he’s been cured many

times, he’s never

tried evaporation.