

# Guidance on 'no added lead' and other environmental claims and statements in the Decorative Coatings Sector



Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs  
Nobel House  
17 Smith Square  
London SW1P 3JR  
Telephone 020 7238 6000  
Website: [www.defra.gov.uk](http://www.defra.gov.uk)

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London  
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Tel. 08459 556000

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## Introduction

### Who should read this guidance?

All companies that develop, manufacture or retail cleaning products and:

- Currently make environmental claims about products;
- Are considering how to market the environmental attributes of their products;
- Are receiving queries from customers about the environmental performance of their products and are considering how to respond.

Giving clear, straightforward, environmental information, as outlined in this guidance, has benefits for consumers and business alike. By providing information about the environmental effects and qualities of products, and how to use and dispose of them, environmental claims (sometimes called "green" claims) help consumers to make informed buying choices. They also help to raise awareness of the issues, enhance consumer understanding and improve product standards overall. At the same time businesses can enhance their credentials and demonstrate that they are acting responsibly to consumers, other business partners and regulators.

This document is official government and industry guidance, which has been developed by the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Defra) and the Department of Trade and Industry, with the British Coatings Federation (BCF) to provide clear, user-friendly advice for companies in the decorative coatings sector, who wish to make environmental claims such as 'lead free' about their products. It covers the following areas:

- **Claims relating to Lead Content**
- **Health & Safety Warnings regarding Stripping of Painted Surfaces**
- **VOC (volatile organic compound) Statements**
- **Other Environmental Claims and Statements for Decorative Coatings**

### Claims relating to Lead Content

The retail sale of all lead-containing decorative coatings to the general public has been prohibited for some time. The BCF, Defra and the DTI therefore agree that companies should not be making claims confirming the absence of lead in retail decorative coatings, given that this is a legislative requirement. BCF members also apply this restriction to decorative coatings supplied for professional use. As a result, claims such as:

- 'lead free'
- 'this product contains no added lead'

should not be made, as they are considered misleading to consumers and in breach of the *UK Green Claims Code*<sup>1</sup>.

(1) <http://www.defra.gov.uk/environment/consumerprod/gcc/pdf/gcc.pdf>

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### Health & Safety Warnings regarding Stripping of Painted Surfaces

Given that old painted surfaces may contain lead, decorative coatings manufacturers may wish to include relevant health and safety information to this effect. The BCF has developed the following standard phrase for this purpose for companies to use on products and in product literature:

"Special precautions should be taken during surface preparation of pre-1960s paint surfaces over wood and metal as they may contain harmful lead. For further advice contact ... [advice centre name, address and telephone number]"

Guidance on the removal and repainting of old lead-painted surfaces is available from the BCF on <http://www.coatings.org.uk/> > FAQs > "How do I remove old lead paint".

### VOC (volatile organic compound) Statements

The British coatings industry has adopted a VOC labelling scheme for all decorative coatings to inform customers about the levels of organic solvents and other volatile materials present. Coatings manufacturers use standard terminology, text and categories for all products. Information is provided according to 5 'bands' and manufacturers have a choice of label design to use, either a BCF text box on the back panel (shown below) or a globe label (shown below), the latter subject to signing a licence agreement with B&Q plc. Further information on VOCs can be found from the BCF on <http://www.coatings.org.uk/> > FAQs > "what are VOCs?"

**Minimal: VOC content 0-0.29%**  
**VOCs (Volatile Organic Compounds)**  
**Contribute to atmospheric pollution**



**Minimal VOC**  
**%–0.29%**



**Low VOC**  
**0.30%–7.99%**



**Medium VOC**  
**8%–24.99%**



**High VOC**  
**25%–50%**



**Very High VOC**  
**50%**

N.B. The VOC symbol is protected by licence.

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### Other Environmental Claims and Statements for Decorative Coatings

If you intend to make an environmental claim not covered by one of the above areas, you may find it useful to refer to more general advice produced by the Government – *Green Claims – Practical Guidance* available on line at [www.defra.gov.uk/environment/consumerprod/index.htm](http://www.defra.gov.uk/environment/consumerprod/index.htm).

By following this guidance, companies can ensure that claims are meaningful and in line with existing standards and codes, namely the UK Green Claims Code, international standard ISO 14021 and European Commission Guidelines<sup>2</sup> for making and assessing environmental claims. The guidance is not intended to replace these codes but to provide user-friendly interpretative guidance on how to apply them.

#### Contacts:

Department for Environment Food and Rural Affairs  
Nobel House  
17 Smith Square  
London SW1P 3JR  
Telephone 020 7238 6000  
Website [www.defra.gov.uk](http://www.defra.gov.uk)

British Coatings Federation Ltd  
James House  
Bridge Street  
Leatherhead  
Surrey KT22 7EP  
Telephone 01372 360660  
Website [www.coatings.org.uk](http://www.coatings.org.uk)  
E-mail [enquiry@bcf.co.uk](mailto:enquiry@bcf.co.uk)

(2) [http://www.europa.eu.int/comm/consumers/cons\\_safe/news/green/guidelines\\_en.pdf](http://www.europa.eu.int/comm/consumers/cons_safe/news/green/guidelines_en.pdf)

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