

## Growth Market as Progressive Schools Push Green Agenda

Green Works, Seventh Generation, Others Crop up on Students' Supply Lists

By Jack Neff, September 06, 2010

NEW YORK (AdAge.com) -- When students arrived at PS 107 in Brooklyn's Park Slope neighborhood this year, their parents were asked to provide a "triclosan-free" liquid hand soap, citing suspicions the anti-bacterial agent found in many such soaps is an "endocrine disruptor." Rather than "regular disinfectant wipes" from the likes of Clorox or Lysol with a host of what the school calls "harmful biocides," the letter suggests greener options from Green Works (another Clorox brand) or Seventh Generation.

Also on the list, sent by the "green committee" of the Parent/Teacher Association, are fragrance-free baby wipes, pens with water-based ink, "low odor" dry-erase markers and Elmer glue sticks, which it said "don't contain harmful ingredients."



The San Francisco-area student group Teens Turning Green is working on an 'eco-janitorial closet' list of eco-friendly products schools can stock.

While it's a relatively new trend for students to be asked to contribute cleaning supplies in addition to the usual notebooks and pencils, it's an even newer trend for districts to be picky about the brands. While Park Slope may be ahead of the national curve in green sensibilities, the concerns of its "green committee" don't appear to be isolated. Some other New York public schools joined under the banner of Green Schools NYC and the national Green Schools Alliance last year began circulating a list of green supplies.

Picking up on growing interest in schools, Seventh Generation has marketed around back-to-school time this year. As part of that, it commissioned a study of 400 parents and 300 school teachers on the subject, finding 60% of teachers request parents donate disinfecting wipes for the classroom and on average use disinfecting products on high-contact areas such as doorknobs daily. But 82% say they fear allergies, skin irritation or asthma may result from use of cleaning products at school.

Needless to say, Seventh Generation has a solution to the problem, highlighted by a back-to-school kit of its products and an "eco-friendly" backpack. The kit and backpack are distributed through hundreds of mostly mommy bloggers through the MyBlogSpark network and a listing of "healthy tips" available on PTOToday.com—a site for Parent Teacher Organizations—including

switching to disinfectants that have "no indoor air pollutants."

Seventh Generation also joined with Stonyfield Farm to sponsor back-to-school education events about "how to have a healthier school year" for 1,000 PTOs around the country this year, each expected to reach 100 to 300 parents, according to Maureen Wolpert, brand education director for Seventh Generation. The movement isn't just limited to primary schools, teachers or parents, either.

Method, marketer of natural and botanical cleaning products, recently supplied ingredient information to a San Francisco Bay Area student group, (teensturninggreen.org, which is working on creating an "eco-janitorial closet" list of eco-friendly products that schools can stock.

The addition of cleaning supplies to back-to-school lists has been growing for years as financially strapped schools sought donations from parents because of fears about the H1N1

virus and germs, and as such Clorox Co. and Reckitt Benckiser's Lysol worked hard and successfully got their brands on lists. As a result, the season has become increasingly important to marketers, Ms. Wolpert said.

One difference this year is availability of stronger green-positioned alternatives. Seventh Generation in January launched a line of botanical disinfectants and wipes registered with the Environmental Protection Agency that claim to kill 99.9% of germs, just as Clorox and Lysol products do. Method launched a similar line of disinfecting products and hand sanitizers last month.

So far, with some exceptions like PS 107, Seventh Generation hasn't had much success getting its brand listed on supply lists from teachers or PTOs yet, said Ms. Wolpert. "Based on what we did last year, our focus for next year will be to increase overall awareness [among parents, teachers and PTOs] about our product availability," she said. ■