



MEDIA ADVISORY
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New Specifications Define “Green” for Biobased Food Service Ware

**Experts from Local Government, Retail, Health Care and
Agriculture Collaborate on Environmentally Preferable
Purchasing Specifications for Biobased Cups, Plates, Utensils**

**Conformance with New Parameters Expected to
Promote Sustainable Agriculture, Reduce Waste
and Make Products Safer**

On Wednesday, September 30, 2009, the Sustainable Biomaterials Collaborative (SBC) and the Business-NGO Working Group will release the *Environmentally Preferable Purchasing Specifications for Compostable Biobased Food Service Ware* -- or “BioSpecs.” The BioSpecs, which have been under development for two years by a broad coalition of stakeholders, will be introduced to industry leaders at the Biopolymer Symposium 2009 in Chicago.

Nearly 113 billion disposable cups, 39 billion disposable eating utensils, and 29 billion disposable plates are used in the United States each year, many of which are manufactured from toxic chemicals, in addition to being non-recyclable and non-biodegradable. Thus, the safety and sustainability of food service ware has become a growing issue, with a number of communities even banning the use of polystyrene products. As a result, many companies are replacing fossil-fuel-based plastics with those made from plants such as corn, potatoes, sugarcane, and trees. However challenges remain with their production, use and recyclability.

“Making products from renewable resources is important,” said Stanley Eller, Coordinator of the Sustainable Biomaterials Collaborative. “However, biobased content is not the only measure of sustainability.”

The members of the SBC and the Business-NGO Working Group, which include Whole Foods, Dell, Kaiser Permanente, Health Care Without Harm, and the City and County of San Francisco, have provided clarity on what constitutes sustainability in the BioSpecs. The “Sustainability Criteria” provide guidance, across the product life cycle, on such diverse and complex issues as biomass feedstock

production, use of genetically modified organisms, product additives including nanomaterials and toxic chemicals, product labeling, and end-of-product life issues such as compostability and biodegradability.

“We’re trying to prevent ‘greenwashing’ of products, which may be partially or wholly biobased, but fail to meet other important sustainability standards,” continued Eller.

The BioSpecs provide a framework for buyers to assess the sustainability of these products during three stages of their life cycle: (1) biomass production, (2) manufacturing, and (3) end of product life. By achieving selected criteria in each stage of the cycle, manufacturers can claim recognition for their products at the Bronze, Silver and Gold levels. The Gold level is reserved for the highest level of performance. Examples of those criteria include:

Biomass Production

- Genetically modified crops allowed in field with offset (*Bronze*)
- Product must be 100% biobased carbon with documentation (*Silver*)
- Agricultural biomass must be sustainably grown (*Gold*)

Manufacturing

- Hot cups must contain 10% post-consumer recycled content (*Bronze*)
- No highly hazardous additives such as DEHP or phthalates (*Silver*)
- Local ownership and production must be promoted (*Gold*)

End of Life

- Product must be commercially compostable (*Bronze*)
- Product must be compostable in backyard or home process (*Silver*)
- Product must biodegrade in marine environment (*Gold*)

Food service product buyers can use these specifications to guide their purchases. While 3rd party certifiers may exist for some of the criteria included in the BioSpecs, such as compostability, no organization to date provides 2nd or 3rd party certification of these comprehensive specifications. Buyers should ask their suppliers for data on each criterion along with supporting documentation. Manufacturers of biobased products can also use these BioSpecs as a roadmap to improve the sustainability of the products they offer.

“San Francisco has embarked on an ambitious program toward a goal of zero waste to landfill or incineration fundamentally changing how our discards are managed in the city,” said Jack Macy, Commercial Zero Waste Coordinator for the City and County of San Francisco. “We are composting food service ware directly with food waste and we need to know which products are truly compostable. The BioSpecs provide clear guidance that can help the city meet our goals for reducing waste, toxic emissions, greenhouse gases, and dependence on petroleum-based products.”

The BioSpecs were developed under the leadership of the SBC (a project of the Institute for Local Self-Reliance) and the Business-NGO Working Group (a project of Clean Production Action). Other organizations that played an important role include: the Institute for Agriculture and Trade Policy, Health Care Without Harm, Whole Foods Markets, Environmental Health Fund, City of San Francisco, Lowell Center for Sustainable Production, Dell, Kaiser Permanente, Sustainable Research Group, Oregon Center for Environmental Health and Clean Production Action.

“The BioSpecs are an important step forward for this industry sector in responding to the growing consumer demand for sustainable biobased food service ware,” said Lee Kane, EcoCzar for Whole Foods Market’s North Atlantic Region. “We intend to use and sell these products in our stores and need to have clear standards by which to evaluate them.”

ATTN BUYERS and PRODUCT MANUFACTURERS: You are invited to a webinar on Friday, October 30 from noon – 1:30 pm EST to learn more about, and offer feedback on, the BioSpecs. The webinar will include: Introduction and Overview of the BioSpecs (Stan Eller, Sustainable Biomaterials Collaborative); Biomass, GM Issues and Sustainable Agriculture (Jim Kleinschmit, Institute for Agriculture and Trade Policy); Manufacturing, Hazardous Chemicals, Nano and Additives (Mark Rossi, Clean Production Action); and End of Product Life, Composting, and Biodegradability (Brenda Platt, Institute for Local Self-Reliance). The webinar is co-sponsored by the Sustainable Biomaterials Collaborative and IntertechPira e-Learning. To register for the webinar login to www.Intertechpira.com and click on the e-Learning tab.

The BioSpecs will be available on the SBC website: www.SustainableBiomaterials.org on Wednesday, September 30, 2009, and available for public comment and review until January 15, 2010. All comments will be considered and addressed as needed. A revised version will be posted on the website in February 2010.

ATTN JOURNALISTS: For advance access to the BioSpecs, please call Shayna Samuels at 718-541-4785.