

# INDOOR AIR QUALITY UPDATE

## CRI Starts Carpet Certification Program To Wipe Slate Clean

BY KIMBERLY GAVIN

DALTON — The effects of carpet on indoor air quality has emerged as the issue of the decade. Unlike issues of flammability and toxicity, the carpet industry was thrust into the national spotlight on this one, with mass media making accusations against a product long considered safe by consumers.

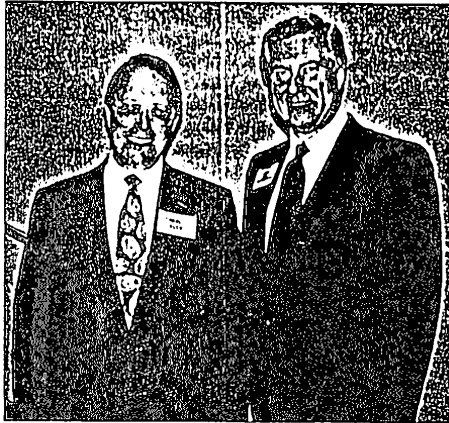
Also for the first time, the carpet industry found itself closely scrutinized by the government. Air quality issues were brought into the spotlight by an incident occurring at the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) headquarters. EPA responded with an investigation and resulting series

of meetings, known as the EPA Dialogue, designed to assess the issue.

That process is over. After a year of scrutiny by outside and inside experts, the carpet industry can breathe a little easier. During the annual fall conference, the Carpet and Rug Institute (CRI) revealed its preliminary plan to deal positively with indoor air quality issues.

CRI's plan can be divided into two broad categories:

- A voluntary carpet certification program aimed at reassuring the government and the public that carpet is a safe product.
- A proactive, aggressive approach to communicate carpet's safety to the media and the general public.



Preventing harm to consumers and the carpet industry — Charles M. Auer of the Environmental Protection Agency (left), with CRI president Ron VanGelderren.

## Retailers' Bridge To Public Via CRI Brochure

DALTON — As a result of the Carpet and Rug Institute's work, the industry now has an official environmental policy and honest assessment of carpet's interaction with the indoor environment. Manufacturers, on the verge of self-regulation and a product certification program, have acted responsibly to the indoor air quality (IAQ) issue, according to consensus among Environmental Protection Agency officials, scientists, communication specialists and industry experts.

Now the challenge is to communicate with retailers, consumers and the general public on carpet's role in maintaining IAQ. Dealing with consumers' concerns is not such a simple matter, and retailers, on the front lines each day, will need to stay on top of the latest information. A new brochure from CRI entitled "A Guide

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### Acknowledge The Issue

To open the meeting and set the tone for the conference, Peter Sandman, Ph.D., a risk communications specialist with Rutgers University, assured the industry that IAQ (indoor air quality) will remain an issue with the media and the public.

Sandman defines risk as part hazard, the technical possibilities of a given event happening, and part outrage, the public's perception of that event as it happens.

"Outrage is at the core of what most people mean by risk," Sandman notes. "Reduce the outrage and you reduce the risk."

Sandman warned the industry not to spend time trying to explain the data and ignore the outrage. Nor should carpet makers say nothing, letting sleeping dogs lie. However, the industry doesn't have to pretend the risk is worse than it is.

Above all, he says, don't think it's too late to act. "You're right on schedule. The EPA dialogue is a feather in your cap; the CRI brochure is excellent; the Du Pont summit (see FCW, Oct. 28)

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## Spirer Speaks On 'Wall To Wall' IAQ Crisis

SPECIAL TO FCW

CHICAGO — Peter Spirer, chairman and CEO of Horizon Industries, Inc., took the issue of carpet and indoor air quality right to the dealers last week. Addressing members of the Chicago Floorcovering Association at their annual State of the Industry dinner, Spirer called indoor air quality or IAQ, as it is abbreviated, "the topic of greatest concern at the moment."

"Perhaps no one here has had a consumer complaint about carpet odor or 'off-gassing,'" Spirer notes. "If you haven't, you're lucky, because this is a hot-button issue with the media, an issue I can guarantee you will be forced to deal with, shortly."

Spirer then showed a film entitled "Wall to Wall Crisis,"

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was a good sign. The issue is beginning to develop and you are beginning to respond. Now is the right time to act."

## Dialogue Key

The EPA Dialogue on carpet and indoor air quality began in August of 1990 and concluded last month. Charles M. Auer, director of the EPA's Existing Chemical Assessment Division, praised the CRI and the industry for its credible and honest approach to the proceedings.

"CRI played a major role in setting the tone for these meetings," Auer says, speaking of the CRI's initial study of 19 carpet samples, which "they used to support the view that carpet is a low source of emissions."

Auer described the achievements of the dialogue as "many" but two outstanding results were the development of an approved test method for evaluating carpet emissions and pending publication of an IAQ brochure, with input from EPA, CRI and other involved agencies. Auer expects the brochure to be out sometime after December of this year.

## Certification Plan

The EPA is calling for the continued testing and monitoring of carpet for Total Volatile Organic Compound (TVOC) emissions. Rather than regulations originating with the government agency, the EPA is allowing the carpet industry to voluntarily establish standards.

On Oct. 23, the night before the meeting, CRI's board of directors approved a 10-point certification plan, according to Ron VanGelderren, CRI president. Among other things, the plan specifies that carpet will be certified to meet voluntary standards (recognized as valid by the scientific community) established for indoor air quality.

VanGelderren explained that carpet will be tested by type; he anticipates 12 to 16 product categories. The test method used will be the 24-hour Environmental Chamber test, the method approved by the EPA dialogue.

Once initial certification is established, periodic and random monitoring tests will be conducted no less than once a year. Certified products have the right to carry a special certification label.

VanGelderren expects final details of the program to be completed by the end of the year. Testing will begin early in 1992, with certification issued to companies as their products are tested.

CRI will begin promoting certification in the spring.

## Informing The Public

The CRI's next challenge is communication of the certification plan to the industry and the public.

Jim Jolly, chairman of the Public Affairs Committee and president of J&J Industries, outlined the plan to accomplish that goal.

Referring to a number of erroneous media reports concerning carpet and indoor air quality, Jolly said, "Our challenge is how do we confront these stories and keep the media from magnifying these incidents?"

According to Jolly, the committee is working on "supplying the correct information for the minds and the files," of the national news media. Jolly's committee is constructing press kits to deliver the facts of the certification program and EPA dialogue results.

To communicate with the industry, Jolly plans to use trade newspapers as well as videotape to deliver the message. Government communication will come as a result of the certification and monitoring process.

As for communication with the public, CRI has already made a "Helpful Hints" article about carpet available to 3500 newspapers nationwide.

In addition, there are CRI brochures, "Steps in the Right Direction, An Owner's Manual," already published. The latest ammunition is the CRI brochure titled, "A Guide to Carpet and Your Indoor Environment," (see story, beginning on page 1).

Jolly also said that the EPA-sponsored brochure, when available, will augment consumer communication.

"We're determined to give the brochures as broad a distribution as we can," Jolly said. "We should be more proactive as an industry,"

especially concerning the certification program, which can "give the consumer confidence and the reassurance to buy our products," Jolly concluded.

## Other Business

In addition to bringing the industry up to date on IAQ issues, CRI participants also heard from Steve Embry, a fire litigation attorney. Embry reported that there are a couple of cases pending that could give the industry a bad name, and urged mills to mount serious defenses when cases come up.

Mark Joelson, a Washington attorney reviewed Canadian allegations of carpet dumping and stressed that dumping legislation from all countries must be taken seriously when entering new markets. Joelson said, regardless of the outcome in Canada, producers should price their products carefully.

Robert Ficks, Jr., executive director of the Home Furnishings Council, and Ernest N. Stewart, director of market research for the National Decorating Products Association, addressed the marketing future of carpet.

Dr. Michael Berry, deputy director of the EPA's Environmental Criteria and Assessment office, revealed the preliminary results of his research on the effect cleaning has on the contamination of carpet. He concluded that any cleaning improves the quality of the environment.

## CRI's Environmental Policy

The Carpet and Rug Institute, at the annual Fall Conference, introduced the association's official policy statement on the environment and urged all carpet manufacturers to join the association in adopting this policy.

"The safety and health of the consumer, as well as the preservation of the environment, are of primary importance to the carpet and rug industry.

"Therefore, we affirm our individual and collective commitment to continual improvements in the environmental safety of carpet and its manufacturing process, so that it remains the floor covering preferred by consumers worldwide. We also dedicate ourselves to improving our communications with consumers and others, so that the carpet industry keeps the public's trust as an industry that aggressively promotes the benefits of its products, but also acknowledges its responsibilities and values the perspectives of its critics. We commit our individual and collective resources to the accomplishments of these vital objectives which advance the ongoing efforts of the carpet and rug industry.

"We will:

1. meet or exceed the requirements of all environmental laws and regulations in the development, production and distribution of our products;
2. strive for excellence on all environmental matters, with particular emphasis on groundwater, air quality and solid waste management issues;
3. ensure that the materials and processes used in our manufacturing facilities take into full consideration the health and safety of our employees;
4. assume a leadership role in communicating with suppliers, distributors, retailers, consumers and other interested parties about relevant environmental issues;
5. make environmental goals and objectives a part of our business plans and support them with appropriate resources and programs;
6. protect the health and safety of consumers and the public in the communities in which we operate.

—Kim Gavin