

# Waterborne:

## the Environment, the Industry and You



One of the most sensitive areas that has affected not only us Canadians but also our counterparts around the world is the environment. We have experienced “strange weather,” read about vehicle bans in China to ensure clean air for the upcoming Olympics; we have seen the growing popularity of ‘Hybrid’ vehicles, followed the Kyoto debate, and even paid to see Al Gore’s documentary on the greenhouse effect! All of these things are global concerns and all revolve around our environment and our very future.

» by Jim MacDonald

**Here in Canada** we see provinces addressing environmental issues independently as well as conferring with the 'Feds' with regard to nation wide controls. Our industry has been hearing about pending federal (Environment Canada) regulations for the last couple of years and you should be congratulated on how you have embraced the change. By attending clinics, training, information sessions and forums you have demonstrated responsibility in educating yourself about what you need to do to be ready.

The paint companies have rolled out their new waterborne materials and many of you reading this are already using them! As an industry you should be proud of your approach, especially considering we still don't know exactly what the final regulations will be!

Despite our vigilance on this 'environmental' issue, recent surveys indicate that only 34% of Canadians actually look for 'environmentally responsible' companies to purchase from, and only 14% believe it is industry's responsibility to take the lead in environmental issues. With

that said, pending regulation changes were first discussed a few years ago and our industry has embraced it, making you responsible, environmentally friendly citizens.

Despite the difficulties associated with change, and despite the absence of regulations and laws (at this point), the automotive refinishing industry has already changed and we cannot argue that this change has not been for the better!

**We have been using highly toxic chemicals for years and the trend seemed to be the more 'dangerous' the better it did its job!**

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**The good news is, we have embraced it and we will be ready when the time comes!**

We have been using highly toxic chemicals for years and the trend seemed to be the more 'dangerous' the better it did its job! Materials dried faster, set up better, were more 'goof proof,' etc., and we embraced each new product that came our way without concern for anything but our bottom line.

I think we can honestly agree we were not thinking of the effect we had on the environment. As business people our concern was to pay the bills, pay our employees, keep the lights on and at the end of the day put a couple of bucks in our pockets!

TODAY we are aware! TODAY we know changes are coming! TODAY, as an industry we are ready to make the changes knowing they will not only create a more environmentally friendly workplace but allow us to still put a couple of bucks in our pockets. We were dragged kicking and screaming, but we were forced to become aware of a lot more than we perhaps first considered!

Some have been frustrated by the amount of time Environment Canada has kept us waiting; however, as a frequent visitor to shops I have noted a true change. From sour to sweet. With all the information and training that has been put out there I have experienced shops owners who are 'back in touch' with their businesses. We are on top of what is going on. Material costs, proper techniques, trained employees, helpful partners/suppliers—we're in tune with them all.

**Here you are, more in touch with your business than you have been, probably since the day you opened the door or picked up a spray gun!**

In the past, we had seen lots of changes but ignored many. Environmentally friendly products had been introduced and we did not give them the time of day. Unfortunately it took pending legislation (a legal 2 X 4 between the eyes) to get our attention! *The good news is, we have embraced it and we will be ready when the time comes!* In the mean time, pat yourself on the back for taking the 'global issue' of the environment *seriously*, not to mention the spin-off advantages we have coincidentally received!

The by-products of industry being forced to become 'environmentally friendly' have included:

- Up-to-date training (employees are at the top of their game)
- Enhanced supplier relationships (paint companies have re-connected with their customers to ensure changeovers go smoothly)
- Up-to-date equipment (as a result of shop inventories done by paint suppliers in preparation for new materials)
- Potential shortcomings (pointed out in previously mentioned inventories and gleaned in clinics and forums)
- Stronger employer/employee relationships (due

to owners having to know how to properly use these new materials and learn from clinics or recently trained employees)

- Introduction of new techniques and practices (equipment suppliers have been forced to go back to the drawing board and have come up with some very new and very productive ideas)
- Reconnection with your day-to-day procedures (by attending the previously mentioned clinics/training/forums we have been exposed to new and old ideas you might not have otherwise been exposed to)
- Developing a uniquely *Canadian* approach to the collision refinish industry
- Taking the lead in *not* just environmental issues but the approach to the industry.


Sometimes we need to take a step backwards to move ahead. Due to environmental concerns the industry was forced to work together in a fashion it had *never* done previously. Shop owners, painters, paint companies and equipment manufacturers all prepared for the change—*collectively!*

When we first heard rumblings of the waterborne materials coming we were less than pleased. When we sat and heard that we were going to be 'legislated into' what materials we could and could not use we were downright angry! Fear and resentment were rampant...but where did that take you?

Here you are, more in touch with your business than you have been, probably since the day you opened the door or picked up a spray gun! Change is good, and sometimes the bigger the change the better it is.

For the first time in my 25+ years in the industry I have owners, painters, and preppers wanting to show me their work. They tell me about the new procedures they have learned, the time they save, and the efficiencies they have developed. Pride in equipment, knowledge and technique has *never* been higher.

All of this has been accomplished, *not to mention becoming environmentally friendly*. You have taken huge steps and you have become better at what you do...all because of legislation, the exact contents of which we don't even know yet.

Because of Waterborne—The Environment, the Industry and YOU are in a better position than you have been in years. Take pride in your accomplishments and recognize that change is a difficult dynamic that often makes us much better at what we were already pretty good at doing! 

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*Jim MacDonald became North American Service Manager for DeVilbiss when they created separate Spray Booth Divisions in the late 1980s. He went on to become Canadian Sales Manager for DeVilbiss Spray Booth Products, which became Team Blowtherm in 1997. He spent four years with Team Blowtherm and joined Ontario Spray Booth as partner/sales manager in 2002, where he has been ever since.*

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