

USGBC Final Report: PVC an Unhealthy Building Material

(February 27, 2007) Washington, DC. The U.S. Green Building Council (USGBC), the nation's largest green building organization, yesterday released its long-awaited assessment of the health and environmental impacts of polyvinyl chloride plastic (PVC) building materials.

The report makes clear that PVC, also commonly known as vinyl, is not a healthy building material. A proper accounting of the human health impacts of PVC across its lifecycle, including disposal issues and occupational exposure, finds that PVC leads to the release of dangerous quantities of dioxin and other carcinogens. The report authors found that, "When we add end of life with accidental landfill fires and backyard burning, the additional risk of dioxin emissions **puts PVC consistently among the worst materials for human health impacts...**"

The report concludes the work of the USGBC's Technical and Scientific Advisory Committee (TSAC), which conducted the PVC analysis in order to inform the USGBC's LEED Steering Committee on a PVC-related credit within the LEED® Green Building Rating System™.

Citing data uncertainties and mixed environmental performance of some of the alternatives studied, the report did not recommend a specific credit on PVC. Instead the TSAC recommended issue-based credits, specifically suggesting "comprehensive approaches to issues such as bioaccumulative pollutants" and incentives for continuous improvement of materials. It suggested areas for further research and acknowledged the Precautionary Principle as a fundamental principle for the USGBC in guiding decisions based on their findings. The report will now go to the LEED Steering Committee to determine next steps.

"This report affirms concerns that the environmental health community has long held about PVC that are already driving substantial market shifts," said Tom Lent, Policy Director for the Healthy Building Network. "The report makes important contributions to materials analysis with its accounting of human health and end-of-life impacts of building materials. We are confident that an appropriate application of the Precautionary Principle to this body of work can help the USGBC produce sound policies and practices to encourage the development of healthier materials."