

TECHNICAL BULLETIN

Understanding *Consumer Reports*

Each year when *Consumer Reports* publishes its paint ratings, we receive calls from both painting contractors and do-it-yourselfers asking about the results.

The magazine does a good job explaining products to consumers. Unfortunately, focusing only on companies that sell or distribute paints *nationally* limits the amount of information that can be provided, and this creates an incomplete picture of products available to consumers.

However, it's just as important to analyze their commentary and specific product rankings to understand what they really mean. Here are some talking points to use with customers who ask about *Consumer Reports*.

EG-Free

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency lists ethylene glycol (EG) as a Hazardous Air Pollutant (HAP) and the State of California designates it as a Toxic Air Contaminant (TAC), yet Dunn-Edwards is *still* the only major paint manufacturer that does not use EG, nor any other HAP or TAC, in any of its waterborne latex products. This makes them safer for painting contractors, their customers, and the environment.

As we have stated with past issues, *Consumer Reports* specifically advises readers to “avoid paints containing ethylene glycol” – but does nothing to identify the brands that contain this chemical.



Also, Dunn-Edwards Zero VOC colorants perform the same as conventional colorants, but with no added VOC solvents. So Zero VOC paint can remain truly Zero VOC, even when tinted to the deepest colors. Lastly, unlike colorants used by some of the national paint companies, Dunn-Edwards Zero VOC colorants are free of any U.S. EPA “Chemicals of Concern.”

Performance Tests and Reporting Results

We test a broader range of paint properties, consistent with our focus on painting professionals, using well-established industry standards. These include many application and dry film properties such as flow-and-leveling, sag resistance, hardness, and impact resistance properties. With specific tests such as dirt pick up resistance, we subject paint films to conditions in the Los Angeles area that cannot be replicated in other areas of the U.S.

Overall, we actually provide a more complete picture of paint performance than the testing performed by *Consumer Reports*.

With testing done in New York, their focus is not entirely applicable to us here in the Southwest, where our products are formulated to perform in a range of challenging environments – from the harsh heat of the Mojave Desert, to the freezing temperatures of the Sierra Nevada Mountains, to the salty moist air of the California coast.

Paint Formulation Approaches

Although *Consumer Reports* accurately states that manufacturers are always reformulating paints, readers can be misled by advice that “the paint you loved last time may not do as well this time around” or “economy grades – typically dubbed contractor grade – haven’t performed well.”

The industry continues to reformulate paints for a host of reasons including performance improvements, regulatory compliance, and new innovations. Although some companies may sacrifice performance, at Dunn-Edwards we ensure that any new formulas will have equal, if not superior, performance compared to existing products.

Also, paints are formulated for a specific purpose and intended use. At Dunn-Edwards, our R&D Labs focus on developing the right balance of properties in paint formulations that professionals need for specific types of projects. Are these

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properties different for paints sold and used exclusively by consumers? Absolutely! Professionals demand products that apply well under various conditions, provide the right finish for their clients, and ensure long-term durability for various types of projects from custom residential homes to commercial office spaces.

Specific Paint Rating Issues

Professionals know that paint performance testing for a flat, eggshell and semi-gloss varies. Trying to “combine the scores into one to simplify the selection process,” as *Consumer Reports* suggests, is a poor approach. For example, gloss retention is meaningful when testing non-flat finishes, whereas stain resistance is more meaningful when testing a flat paint. How is a consumer supposed to see these subtleties in paint performance with one rating for all?



Behr® Marquee® and Valspar® Reserve rank number one and two, respectively, in the Interior Paint Ratings, but they score only “Good” in Surface Smoothness. Professionals know that application properties, such as flow-and-leveling and sag resistance, are important to avoid any surface imperfections caused by brush and roller marks, especially when applying higher sheen finishes on door, trim, and cabinetry projects. We pay very close attention to how a paint applies, so contractors and their clients are satisfied with the finish.

Consumer Reports, along with many paint brands, continue to recognize and promote the concept of “Paint & Primer in One.” All products tested in the Exterior Paint Ratings have “Excellent” to “Good” ratings, but what type of surface were they applied to? With exterior projects, it is especially important to use the right primer for wood, concrete, or metal surfaces to get a lasting paint finish. Primers and paints work as a system to prevent substrate-related problems and conditions from occurring. This concept is not clearly conveyed in the paint ratings. Interestingly, Behr, who is a major player in the “Paint & Primer in One” segment, recently launched a campaign at the 2016 International Builder Show that was titled “The Power of Priming” to *begin* educating customers on the value of using a primer.

Don't hesitate when your customers ask questions – be prepared to respond and educate them! Your customers will have greater respect for you and Dunn-Edwards if you can be informative.

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