

Caroline Lucas MP
House of Commons

2 May 2011

You asked a Parliamentary Question about the use of EU Ecolable cleaning products on the Parliamentary estate, and John Thurso has invited me to write to provide you with further information.

Our cleaning contractor, KGB, has been working with Diversey (previously known as Johnson-Diversey), their supplier of cleaning products, for some time on sustainability issues and in finding ways to reduce environmental impact. They understand the benefits of using EU Ecolable products, but they consider that in some situations, such as here at Parliament, they achieve a better environmental footprint with the range of products they are presently using.

Diversey has very strong sustainability credentials and a proven track record as a leader in green technologies. The company is one of the founder members of the A.I.S.E. charter for sustainable cleaning, is accredited for the use of the Nordic Ecolable and is one of a small number of companies in the world to be accepted into the World Wildlife Fund Climate Savers programme. A headline target of that programme is a 25% reduction in absolute emissions during the 10 years between 2003 and 2013.

Diversey has a range of products that carry the EU Ecolable and they consider that their place in the market is to improve the environmental performance of a customer who has never previously looked at cleaning products in a sustainable way. However, they consider that the EU Ecolable is a compromise solution which can be bettered by more sophisticated cleaning operations.

One issue is that there is no category within EU Ecolable to cover products such as sanitisers and disinfectants which are used in our cleaning operations for health and hygiene reasons. Our contractor appreciates the need to reduce the use of such products and trials are being undertaken with ionising systems which sanitise without using chemicals.

An additional point is that the requirement for a product to achieve EU Ecolable status depends largely on the type and concentration of chemicals and colourings, and not the wider issues of sustainability and environmental impact. This is helpful for a chemical manufacturer who has never before considered such matters since it encourages steps in the right direction. Some of these products will also be ideal for a small end-user who will use limited amounts of chemicals on a monthly basis. The reason for this is that the chemicals have to be formulated to be either ready-to-use (ie no further dilution required) or as fairly weak concentrates, where only a little water is added in order to achieve the correct working concentration.

The approach KGB has adopted in conjunction with Diversey is to adopt a super-concentrated product with a dispensing system which allows the chemical to be heavily diluted on site to achieve working concentrations. An example of the reduced environmental impact of these products is shown below in a comparison of two of Diversey's products, a super concentrate and one which carries the EU label. To deliver equal cleaning capability requires:

Sprint Ready To Use (EU Ecolable)

- 667 Cases containing 4,000 bottles = 3,000 litres
- 7 Pallets (1/3 lorry)
- 296 kg plastic
- 160 kg cardboard
- 746.2 kg CO2

Sprint 200 1L Controlled Dosing (super concentrate)

- 10 Cases containing 60 bottles = 60 litres which dilutes to 3,000 litres
- 1/2 Pallet layer
- 4.6 kg plastic
- 3.7 kg cardboard
- 14.5 kg CO2

There is also an inherent cost in manufacturing, packaging and transporting chemicals to customers, which has an impact on price. At present the per-bottle price for those super-concentrate chemicals used regularly here averages out at around 8p per bottle. If these products were to be replaced by standard concentrates that cost would increase to around 25p, with ready-to-use solutions coming in at around £2.20 per bottle.

I hope that this is useful. I do assure you that I am a strong believer in the need to reduce our environmental impact and increase the sustainability of our operations. If you wish to have any further information, do please let me know.

Yours sincerely,

John Borley
Director General
Department of Facilities