

Panel

Taking Action on Paint Strippers: Retailers and Suppliers Report from the Field

Presentation: [Click here to download slides](#)

Moderator:

Sally Edwards, Director of Retailer Engagement, GC3

Presenters:

Chris Cassell, Director of Corporate Sustainability, Lowe's Companies, Inc.

Paul Ellis, Head of Sustainable Chemicals Management, Kingfisher

Tess Fennelly, CEO, remooble

Greg Morose, Research Manager, Toxics Use Reduction Institute (TURI)

Summary:

The goal of this session was to use the case study of replacing methylene chloride/NMP in paint strippers as an example to speak to the challenges of successfully developing/identifying safer alternatives and implementing them in products and to analyze how to overcome barriers and challenges.

Paul Ellis from Kingfisher outlined his company's experience with replacing products containing MC/NMP and identified the main challenges of replacing a hazardous chemical in a product and how to avoid a regrettable substitution. He also identified that the main drivers of change for replacing a hazardous chemical are regulations such as REACH and input from customers.

Chris Cassell from Lowes discussed Lowes' sustainability goals and the challenges of banning and replacing MC/NMP paint strippers, citing retail competition, performance of alternatives, and supplier dissonance as major hurdles. Lowe's has introduced alternative products that do not contain MC/NMP but some of these products contain hazardous chemicals. Lowe's is working with its suppliers to identify better options.

Greg Morose from TURI reviewed what is currently unfolding in the marketplace with some potential regrettable substitutions for paint strippers. To meet demands, some companies are replacing products containing MC/NMP with products that contain chemicals categorized as benchmark 1 (avoid) according to Green Screen®. Consumers and retailers need to be aware of which products are safer and which ones are hazardous.

Tess Fennelly, CEO of the startup remooble, talked about creating a company focused on creating safer products through green chemistry. Her company has created a paint stripper that does not have any GHS symbols. She talked about the difficulty of getting the product on shelves due to competition with legacy brands and not having a suite of products to compete with these brands. remooble has struggled to convince retailers to purchase their products and noted barriers such as greenwashing, misleading packaging, and skepticism about performance.

Key Takeaways:

- Retailers value sustainability and product stewardship and actively look for safe and effective products for their customers.
- Key drivers for change include regulations (EPA and REACH), consumer needs, and communication/pressure from NGOs.

- Retailers find value in conferences like the GC3 to communicate with startups and learn about innovative technology which is crucial for progress.
- In responding to market/policy demands, retailers need green products quickly that are scaled-up, high performing, and shelf ready.
- Ongoing challenges include competition with the incumbent brands, greenwashing, and skepticism of performance of new products.
- Long-term contracts with suppliers may constrain retailers from introducing new products.
- Startups like remooble have created safe and effective alternatives, but struggle to get shelf space at large retailers.
- Retailers and consumers need to be educated on which products contain regrettable substitutions and which are the safer options.