

# AMERICAN PAINTING CONTRACTOR

OUR 86th YEAR

Vol. 86, No. 3 • April 2009

[www.paintmag.com](http://www.paintmag.com)

## CHOOSING THE RIGHT RESPIRATOR

PLUS



SPRAYER TUNE UP GUIDE

# Is There an Eco in Here?

A “From the Field” test of Green Paint.



By Scott Burt

“Eco-friendly” or “green” paints are a major focus of paint manufacturers today. The market has been overwhelmed with products intending to solve the VOC problem. It can be difficult for paint contractors to sort through the marketing and promises associated with new

products, much less assess their value and performance. I’d like to commit some “From the Field” time and energy to passing along some real-world feedback about some of these products in 2009. Last year, my company discovered Mythic Paint, which has been in development since 2002, and put it to the test in the field.

## What’s the Problem?

In basic technical terms, traditional paints contain solvents in their bases,

binders, colorants, driers, etc., that emit VOCs as they off-gas during the drying process. VOCs contribute on a very large scale to air quality, particularly smog. For that reason, regulations for manufacturers are becoming more and more strict. This, in turn, encourages manufacturers to modify their existing lines to meet tighter regulations or develop new lines and hope for the best. We have tested some carefully marketed “green” products that failed miserably by professional standards in the field. Green

products can be pricy, difficult to work with and lacking in durability. Further complicating the matter is the fact that research-savvy consumers seek a clear definition of what a “green” paint should be. Many third-party organizations work to define it, such as Greenguard, Green Seal and LEED, which can make it even more complicated to understand.

## Relevance

If VOCs contribute to smog, and the research indicates that they do so at a rate of 23 million tons per day from architectural coatings alone (yes, that is the equivalent of 1.6 million cars on the road), then perhaps we should rethink the concept of allowing so many VOCs into our day-to-day work lives. The effects on our health include asthma and lung and heart disease, among other conditions. Mythic paints are in a very small category of paints to come to the market with zero VOCs, zero carcinogens and zero toxins. The colorants in Mythic are nontoxic and zero-VOC, which is one sign of a well-thought-out paint.

## How Does It Work?

Our crew of experienced paint professionals took three Mythic products into the field to test their working capacities on a job. We tested flat ceiling white, eggshell wall paint and semi-gloss trim paint. We repainted a three-year-old master bathroom and here is what we found:

- **Flat Ceiling White MP100-L**

After sanding and cleaning the ceiling to prepare it for new paint, we applied Mythic flat in two coats, with four hours between coats. The brush cuts and roller passes were very consistent in coverage. The base has a desirable balance of thickness and spread ability with minimal splatter. There was very little detectable odor during the application and drying processes – significantly less than we have observed in low-VOC paints. The result was a perfectly flat sheen and nicely leveled finish that showed no roller marks in either natural or artificial light.

- **Eggshell Wall Paint MP101-C**

The wall paint was accurately mixed

by Mythic to match a competitor’s color. The color was a brownish tan, and we applied it over an existing flat, off-white wall paint – a perfect situation to test the coverage characteristics of a deeper base color. The first coat of Mythic covered extremely well. Like the ceiling paint, the base felt thick but flowed off the roller smoothly with impressive leveling characteristics. The working time was just right and it tacked up quickly on the wall. After the recommended four-hour dry time, we applied the second coat and reached a very satisfactory coverage and color intensity. One of the classic challenges of using eggshell paint is getting it to touch-up properly without flashing. To test Mythic eggshell for touch-up, we went back after the second coat was cured and redrew a long vertical cut line where the wall meets the door casing at eye level in direct natural light from a window. On drying, there was no indication of the additional brushwork. As well, we did a thin touch-up-style roller swatch on the wall, and it blended to the point of being undetectable. For an eggshell in a deep base, that is exceptional quality.

- **Semi-Gloss Trim MP102-W**

Trim paints are the holy grail of paints. We are always searching for a better one. It is ironic because painters spread far more gallons on ceilings and walls than on trim, but we border on neurotic about every working characteristic of the paint we apply to trim. It has to brush out smoothly and level, have reasonable working time, and dry quickly after being spread. The Mythic semi-gloss was thick coming off the brush, which was great for coverage but made it a challenge on spreadability. With any new trim product there is a learning curve, and with Mythic it was rather quick. Our first coat was applied thin, and we intentionally avoided altering the paint so that we could get an accurate assessment of its inherent characteristics. Applying a thin first coat over previously painted but sanded doors and casings with no thinning or conditioning, it was difficult to achieve a perfectly brushed finish with-

out the paint drying during application – not quite enough open time. There was a tendency for clumping and pulling if the product was over-brushed. We chose not to introduce a conditioner or extender, as we didn’t want to modify the product in any way that would introduce chemicals or VOCs. After curing and sanding between coats, we applied a second coat that was thinned with water. This was a much better experience. Again, it is pretty standard procedure for us to thin or condition trim paints to extend the working time. Because of the thickness of the product, we could liberally thin Mythic on the second coat without compromising its coverage. The result was a smooth and durable coating that approaches the quality standard of an ultra-premium product.

## Conclusion

There is a lot happening in the world of “green” paint technologies right now. There are new entries like Mythic, and even the major manufacturers are reformulating existing lines or introducing new lines of low- and no-VOC paints. Half the battle for paint contractors is to sort through the “pretenders” in the marketplace and identify the “contenders.” Mythic Paint has hit the mark by completely satisfying the environmental goals of an eco-friendly product with their innovative nontoxic formula. And they have also created a product that is capable of performance to a very high standard. They have helped raise the bar by producing a nontoxic zero-VOC paint that performs the way professionals need it to. Mythic Paint retail locations are sprouting up all over the country, with the retail price of its paint ranging from \$35 to \$45/gallon. This makes it a solid value, particularly in relation to some of the higher-priced ultra-premium offerings that are not zero-VOC. Over time the market will decide which of the eco-friendly products are here to stay. **APC**

*Scott Burt is a painting contractor who owns and operates Topcoat Finishes Inc. of Jericho, Vt. He can be reached at [www.topcoatfinishes.com](http://www.topcoatfinishes.com).*