

The Continuing Evolution of Green Cleaning Products

Until Clorox unveiled Green Works, its new all-natural cleaning line last year, the concept of an eco-friendly household cleaner was nothing but hippie rhetoric to the average American. Clorox launched a massive ad campaign and strategic product placement including prominent Wal-Mart displays, and the product has flown off the shelves. Why? The answer is simple. Consumers will buy green in masses motivated by only one critical factor: cost.

Alex Gaughen sheepishly admitted so much as he exited his local Stop and Shop last week. “I like that is good for the environment,” he said, “but like that it is better for my budget more.” When asked what motivated him to buy the Green Works toilet bowl cleaner he had peaking out of his grocery bag, he answered, “It was in the bargain isle and a few dollars cheaper than the product I normally buy. I don’t know how much I should expect from all-natural ingredients, but for the price I’m willing try.” For the shopper who passes by the often overwhelming bargain isle at Stop and Shop, they are likely to pass right by the Green Works deal.

Green Works is not the first product of its kind by any means. Seventh Generation, a Vermont based company began selling all natural cleaning products in 1988. However, over the past twenty years, due to prices, Seventh Generation has remained a product line for the truly dedicated eco-activists. To this day, the Seventh Generation all-purpose cleaner is two times more expensive than most comparable chemical cleaners, coming in at \$6.50 in most retailers.

While it may be the new kid on the block, Green Works is treading water because is it making old mistakes. Though a bottle of the Green Works all-purpose cleaner doesn’t reach \$6.50 like its forbearers, it still packs a fiscal punch at around \$5.00 according to Staples.com compared to a traditional chemical product like Lysol’s all purpose cleaner, which only costs \$3.50 at Staples and comparable with other retailers like Drugstores.com and TrueValue.com pricing the products similarly although Wal-Mart has much better comparative pricing. More so, many consumers claim they use more Green Works and comparable cleaners to get the same job done.

Clearly, Green Works is not the final answer to an all natural cleaner that replaces America’s use of traditional chemical cleaners, despite Clorox’s insistence that it is. It is, however, a necessary step in the right direction. The endorsement of such a project by a leading cleaning company is a good sign that in the next ten years, consumers can expect to see more major brands introducing their own answers to the issue.

Unquestionably, the two main areas that need work are product effectiveness and cost. Ideally, a green business plan that addresses these issues would be well received by consumers as well retailers of substance like Stop and Shop and Wal-Mart to have them discount and push these eco-friendly cleaning brands and raise community awareness about their benefits. We believe this will happen and more, and the average household in US and much of the world will eventually have nothing but all natural products under their sinks.

Note: Clorox has issues with pollution at many plants as per the Sierra Club and is far from a “green company”, but Green Works a step in right direction.