



ECOSTYLE

Delia Montgomery

MOST EVERY green business with walk-in clients needs a sign. Some may have the freedom to use any materials they wish while others must abide by established standards. The point here is the opportunity for ecobusinesses to walk the talk with signage.

Recycled plastic consists primarily of HDPE, (high density polyethylene), the typical packaging choice for milk jugs and liquid laundry detergent bottles. Recycled plastic industries are gaining respect because their products benefit the environment. In summary, recycled plastic signs are a maintenance-free, long-lasting alternative to traditional hardwood. Usage saves our trees, spares our landfills, and the final product is also recyclable. You never need to paint them, they're difficult to vandalize, and they're even graffiti resistant. Kiss those pesky wood splinters goodbye! And unlike treated wood, recycled plastic does not leach or contaminate soil and ground water with toxic chemicals.

The *Green Resource Center*, which advocates sustainable building, explains that plastic lumber is commonly available in three grades: hollow, solid, and structural solid. It's the hollow grade plastic that is preferred for signage.

Many manufacturers claim that recycled wood-composite plastic is more rigid than 100 percent recycled plastic because the wood fibers act as rein-

forcement. The plastic encapsulates and binds the wood to resist moisture penetration and degradation from fungal rot, bringing together some of the best properties of both wood and plastic. But whether all recycled plastic, or wood and plastic combos typical for lumber, the Center cautions buyers to check the fine print of ingredients because a number of manufacturers produce 100 percent virgin plastic, or PVC lumber, which is not at all considered earth-friendly.

The Plastic Lumber Company of Akron, Ohio sells a product line called "Simple Signs" that are produced from layered sheets of differently colored recycled plastic. A computerized router cuts away plastic of one color to produce a graphic. Then another color typically provides text for the sign.

For those who make their own signs, recycled plastic sheeting is offered by *Bedford Technology* in Worthington, Minnesota. They're sized about four by eight feet in a variety of thickness options.

These custom sign and sheet sources are mere examples of the growing recycled plastics industry. Also, note more sources available from *The American Plastics Council*. It's a major trade association that supports economically and environmentally responsible and sustainable plastics recycling. Find a world of positive statistics on their affiliate site, www.plasticsresource.com.

Formerly *Jefferson Recycled Woodworks*, *TerraMai* has a different environmental vision. Located in McCloud, California, they supply reclaimed and vintage lumber, paneling, siding and other building materials. Builders love to use these products because of custom millwork capabilities and the knowledgeable, individualized service. You get aesthetic beauty, one-of-a-kind results, and gratification that you are doing something meaningful to protect the world's remaining old-growth forests. This is a unique business where an outstanding

sign could be made. These world-traveling partners hold impressive portfolios, such as providing materials for Patagonia retail stores. And the company is currently going through the application process to become a SmartWood certified manufacturer. As I write, they offer posts reclaimed from vintage Southeast Asian buildings, 40 to 100 years old. The posts were slated for demolition. Wow, how about a sign with these beautifully weathered posts for say, an ecoresort?

Although HDPE containers to recycle are exceeded by production, a near future balance appears on the horizon by reinvigorating community collection programs. You may opt to consider other ecomaterials for creative ideas, interior or exterior. Examples are plastic tiles which are made from recycled ingredients, cork, or recycled glass. You can print on recycled tire rubber and don't forget nontoxic finishes for painted signs. Perhaps your choice could compliment local natural resources, like a recycled plastic sign set in limestone.

Get serious and walk the talk by displaying an ecosign for your green business. Let your community know about it, stir public conversation, and support recycling. □

Delia Montgomery is an environmental design consultant and personal eco shopper for homes, bodies and gardens. Questions or comments are welcome. Visit www.ChicEco.com or e-mail Info@ChicEco.com.

WHAT'S YOUR SIGN?

RESOURCES

www.greenresourcecenter.org
www.plasticlumber.com
www.plasticboards.com
www.americanplasticscouncil.org
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