



by Arely Castellón, LEED Green Associate

AUDITING YOUR CONSUMABLES GETTING THE BIGGEST **BANG** FOR THE **BUCK**

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ave you noticed that contents of food packages have decreased in the past couple of years?

Cereal boxes contain less cereal and boxes of granola bars contain fewer bars. Portions have been reduced but not prices. How about the size and quantity of your kitchen paper towels lately? There are fewer towels, and yet the price does not reflect this.

Paper is made from cotton and earlier this year, we experienced a global shortage, which was reflected in the price of toilet paper and paper towels. Interestingly enough, the packaging of many manufacturers changed as costs increased, resulting in so called “cheater packaging.” Cheater packaging has been around for many years, however, the proliferation has increased dramatically this past year. Although “cheater” implies deception, in the cleaning industry, it is mostly associated with misleading packaging and labeling.

For example, the standard two-ply toilet paper traditionally has had 500 sheets to the roll, sized at 4.5 in. by 4.5 in., with 96 rolls to the case. However, that is not standard anymore. Sizes have shrunk and often times the sheets measure 3.5 in. by 4.5 in., not to mention a decrease from 96 rolls to 80 rolls per case from several manufacturers. Jumbo rolls used to carry 1,000 linear feet of paper.

Now, a growing trend among some manufacturers is to fluff the paper, so that 800 feet “fluffed with air” looks like 1,000 linear feet. Cheater packaging can result in 20 percent less product, without a price reduction.

The increases in fuel prices in the past few years have directly impacted the price of liners, as they are made with petroleum resin and, in fact, it has helped create a market for cheater liners. As a result, as much as one to three inches are often reduced from the length or width to reduce the resin quantity needed for manufacturing. The labeling does not reflect this, so most buyers are not aware of this. Many products used to list the weight of the content, but this, too, is rapidly disappearing.

The problems with cheater consumable products include fewer rolls of paper per case and smaller rolls of paper, to poorer quality and product inconsistency in liners, all of which are “off-spec.” Almost always, there is no notification of product changes, so the only way to find out is as a result of feedback from cleaning personnel or building occupants. Recently, a superior quality of tissue being used in one building changed from one month to the next. The packaging looked the same, however, the quality was inferior and the size was smaller. As a result, more cases had to be ordered during that month, resulting in greater expense. The reality is the only way to avoid this type of problem is to monitor the quality and take quick action when a change is observed.

The only way to ensure a building is getting good value is to periodically audit the consumables received from distributors or janitorial companies. If products are ordered directly by property management, obtain product sizes, quantities and cost; then compare them to other options. Some surprises will arise and suddenly that 4.5 in. by 4.5 in. tissue of superior quality may very well be less expensive than the inferior 3.5 in. by 4.5 in. product with the lower dollar price per case when content is compared. One simple measure is to look at the quantity of cases ordered over the past year.

If your consumables are supplied by your janitorial company, ask them to monitor the quality of the products. Periodic supply audits will help to ensure your facility is getting a quality product with the best yield and price. Have your janitorial company ask their employees for their observations on any changes in quality or packaging. Recently, we found that one manufacturer changed their packaging, resulting in a smaller case of paper towels, yet the price remained the same. The weight of the paper was less. Upon testing the towel, it tore more easily, resulting in the user needing to use a greater number of paper towels.

Staying on-top of the cheater products is important to ensure a consistent quality of consumables, as well as ensuring your budget dollars are getting the best product possible. Talk to your paper distributor or janitorial company about your product specifications.

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