

The Advantages of Green Support Surfaces

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More chemicals are used in healthcare than just about any other industry. While immediate exposure may come in the form of everyday cleaning products, numerous hidden chemicals can be found in construction materials, healthcare furniture, and even fabrics that release hazards over time. Scientific evidence continues to show how these compounds harm the environment and public health—including patients and caregivers in hospital settings.¹

Exposure to Chemicals of Concern

Government studies have shown that virtually all of us are regularly exposed to a complex mixture of industrial chemicals and other hazardous pollutants. Studies also show we have an increased risk of chemically related disease when we're exposed more closely, more often, and for longer periods of time. Common health effects may include certain types of cancer, infertility, and birth defects to name just a few.¹

In 2011, Practice Greenhealth (PGH) released its green support surface guidelines, which put new limits on several chemicals of concern, including bromine and chlorine. At the time, PGH noted that most hospital-grade support surfaces contained 130,000 PPM of bromine and 200,000 PPM of chlorine. The organization recommended a maximum of 100 PPM for each.²

PGH went one step further in 2012, introducing its *Healthier Hospitals Safer Chemicals Challenge for*

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Healthy Interiors. The program challenges healthcare facilities to ensure that 30 percent of furniture and furnishings purchased eliminate the use of formaldehyde, PFCs, PVC, antimicrobials, and flame retardants. Today, more than 300 hospitals and health systems participate nationwide.³

It's Not Easy Being Green

PGH recognizes only two support surface manufacturers for having met or exceeded the Healthy Interiors goal of reducing or eliminating chemicals of concern—and only one makes products for adult-sized patients.⁴ These products include mattresses, patient repositioners, overlays, operating room and stretcher pads as well as wheelchair cushions.

Green products are of interest not only to the clinicians who work around them every day—but also to a growing number of hospitals and systems which have implemented “Green Teams” to promote environmental initiatives. These teams often establish sustainable procurement policies to encourage their own green purchasing decisions. Under these models, the entire lifecycle of the product might be considered, including manufacturing processes, use of renewable materials, and environmentally sound disposal of the product at its natural end-of-life.⁵