

By Rebecca Wilhelm

Added Vote of Confidence

tech update

Living in an ever-advancing technological age, we often go about our lives assuming the products and food we use and consume are safe. Recent scares regarding the safety of everyday products such as toys, peanut butter and even drinking water, however, have forced many consumers to second-guess their assumptions about safety.

In this environment, reliable third-party certification will likely be a high priority for customers. It provides an opportunity for dealers to demonstrate with confidence the water treatment industry's high commitment to quality and safety.

Why is it Important?

"Consumers are notoriously skeptical of product quality claims made by manufacturer representatives," said Rick Andrew, operations manager, Drinking Water Treatment Units, NSF. "Third-party certification provides the independent confirmation of quality that can help to bridge this gap with potential customers."

Without certification, the burden of assuring safety and quality is upon the dealer, who must convince potential customers that the system he or she is selling is a quality product.

The Water Quality Association (WQA) recently completed a consumer survey that demonstrates that consumers do, in fact, look for third-party certification, said Thomas Palkon, director of product certification for the WQA. "The media continually presents stories to consumers concerning product safety. The Gold Seal is there to eliminate those consumer fears. It is used for consumer recognition, consumer confidence and regulatory compliance." It also is an added marketing benefit, Palkon noted.

NSF & WQA Updates

Both NSF and the WQA recently expanded their laboratory facilities, increasing certification capacity and speed industry-wide.

NSF's expansion includes a new DWTS lab with 50% more space and increased capacity for testing to NSF and new European standards.

"NSF's expanded POU and POE

testing lab has been functioning extremely well," Andrew said. "The efficient layout allows technicians to keep a close eye on tests at all times, and to process tests more quickly. The increased automation and data logging of NSF's upgraded test stands is also helping to improve quality and keep test prices steady."

The first phase of WQA's lab expansion was completed in the first quarter of this year. The expanded lab is capable of handling certification for any size manufacturer.

Eliminating a capacity bottleneck in the industry, "the new lab should be a benefit because it allows quicker, on-time testing so manufacturers can get their products to market as needed," Palkon said.

NSF is now authorized by the California Department of Public Health (CDPH) to conduct third-party certification for products with health claims under NSF/ANSI standards 53 and 44, and they are working to get approval for reverse osmosis (RO) units under NSF/ANSI Standard 58.

In response to lead-reduction legislation in California (AB1953), "NSF has adopted Annex G of Standard 61 to help manufacturers comply with AB1953," Andrew said. "There was significant input from California in this Annex, and it will continue to evolve as specific analytical methods to determine lead content are developed."

WQA is working with NSF on clarifying and further defining what is required for material safety testing for products, Palkon said—"a full overhaul of the section that handles how we soak the products, what contaminants we are looking for in the water we use to soak, pass/fail criteria for these contaminants, which analytical method should be used for

products and to determine if the procedures for testing the safety of the products apply to today's needs."

One of WQA's goals for this year is to include RO systems in the CDPH-authorized third-party approval program, and WQA offers product certification to California's AB1953 for companies needing to demonstrate lead content compliance, Palkon said.

Worldwide

"Currently, new standards are being developed in China, Japan and Taiwan, just to name a few," Andrew said. "And standards have been newly adopted in Israel and Canada. Other countries such as Brazil are adopting mandatory certification requirements to existing standards."

WQA recently signed an agreement with a Brazilian product testing and certification agency, which will allow U.S.-based companies selling in Brazil to keep working with WQA for certification needs, Palkon said.

Using Information

There is a wealth of information available for dealers to stay up to date on certification and standards developments. Every year during the WQA Aquatech USA tradeshow and conference, WQA holds its annual Gold Seal Certification Forum meeting, during which "WQA reviews the Gold Seal policies, proposed changes to the policies and provides up-to-date information on certification," Palkon said.

Information provided by certification agencies can be passed along to consumers as an added vote of confidence in the certified products you offer. By simply directing your customers to these resources, you are assuring them that safety and quality are at the top of your list of priorities. *wqp*

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As consumers' safety concerns continue to grow, so does the importance of third-party certification

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