

## Using certifications to help market products

By Steven Bachleda

# Certification as a Sales Tool

*I recently joined the Water Quality Assn. (WQA) and am busy learning about the product certification process. I have applied for product certifications in the past, and now I am getting to view the process from the other side.*

I am learning that certified products provide a more level playing field for manufacturers and consumers when examining labels, packaging and literature for comparative product claims. There are manufacturers that do not have product certification for drinking water systems, components or water treatment chemicals, and I would be careful of their product claims.

Unsubstantiated claims and misleading product information are a distinct possibility when a product has not been certified by an accredited certifying body, such as WQA, NSF Intl., Underwriters Laboratories, the International Assn. of Plumbing and Mechanical Officials or CSA Intl. An uncertified product could add harmful contaminants to drinking water or not work at all.

### A Customer's Point of View

In my last job, I worked for a manufacturer and was responsible for obtaining and maintaining certification status from various accredited certifying bodies for several of our products. We only had products certified under one or two standards, and for the first few years that I worked there, I did not see the point of certification. I thought it was a waste of money, not to mention that I found filling out the required forms tedious and time consuming.

I also was responsible for answering technical questions from our customers. Many of these phone calls were from customers asking if a product was certified. When I responded, "yes, the product is certified," the customer would say "great" and that was the end of it. When I received questions about uncertified products, the caller was usually disappointed.

After a few of these phone calls, I asked the customers why they were

disappointed. The customer almost always responded that if the product was not certified, they could not use it, and if they were distributors, they could not sell it.

I investigated more and learned that products must pass rigorous and exacting standards in order to be certified. Testing is done by independent, accredited third parties, which guarantees unbiased results for consumers and regulators. These third parties are accredited by organizations such as the American National Standards Institute (ANSI) and Standards Council of Canada.

### Why Certify?

I have been involved with product certification for 11 years now, mostly from the manufacturer's perspective. Since joining the WQA team, I have learned to value the importance of certification even more. A certified product provides the end user or distributor assurance and confidence that the product meets specific safety and performance requirements. It also provides the manufacturer with an important sales and marketing tool. As I learned, a non-certified product may not be as readily accepted by consumers or distributors. Some states may not even allow it to be sold.

Certified drinking water treatment systems or materials meet specific standards related to materials safety, performance claims for chemical reduction and structural integrity of the unit, if applicable. All labels, product packaging, data sheets, data plates, manuals and other literature must also contain the information required by the applicable standard and not make any false or misleading claims. Some states regulate the sale of drinking water treatment units

and require that only certified systems be sold.

### Certification for Marketing

Manufacturers can use product certification to their advantage. The certifying authority issues a certification mark for the products to clearly indicate which standard the product is certified under, and manufacturers can advertise that their product meets standards. Consumers will know that the product was independently tested and meets the requirements of the standard. If a competitor has a similar product that is not certified, it may not meet a customer's safety and performance requirements.

Certification allows a manufacturer to tell consumers they can have confidence in the product, because it meets certain standards and will perform as expected by those standards. This gives a manufacturer a sales edge over a non-certified competitor. A simple "meets NSF/ANSI 42, 44, 53, 58, 60 or 61" can go a long way with an end user or distributor.

Certification also allows manufacturers to use marketing, advertising and sales literature that contains accurate information regarding performance claims. Manufacturers, regulators and consumers can easily identify a certified product by seeing the certification mark and all literature associated with the product.

Certification can be a useful tool for manufacturers by providing better product awareness and acceptance by customers for their products. It allows them to make honest and verifiable claims about their products, and can be used to help increase sales by giving customers information that they can use to make an informed choice. *wqp*

Stephen Bachleda, CWS-VI, is operations manager for the Water Quality Assn. Bachleda can be reached at [sbachleda@wqa.org](mailto:sbachleda@wqa.org) or 630.505.0160.

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