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IN THE MARKET | LET'S TALK / ANTIMICROBIALS

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Proper testing of antimicrobials is a priority.

As interest in antimicrobials has increased in recent years, so too has the level of confusion surrounding this evolving textile category. With more suppliers advancing new and different types of technologies, and more consumers seeking solutions to a broader array of odor-control issues, today's antimicrobial market is often perplexing. Frustration regarding testing inconsistencies is also being felt within the industry. Combined, these factors are thought to be hindering the adoption of responsible antimicrobial products.

The International Antimicrobial Council (IAC) wants to change the situation. Founded in 2011, the non-profit agency promotes and provides industry guidance to better educate businesses and consumers about antimicrobials for textiles and advocate responsible adoption of certified products. Additionally, IAC works to create greater uniformity in testing among microbiological laboratories with a long-range goal of harmonizing global test methods.

"It was obvious from a recent AATCC conference on antimicrobials that there is considerable interest in the category," says Robert Monticello, Ph.D, who serves as a senior technical advisor for the IAC, and presented at the September AATCC meeting in Raleigh, NC.

Dr. Monticello has been involved in the antimicrobial textile industry for over 20 years. He has presented

on antimicrobial agents and treated articles in over 20 countries and is an active member of AATCC RA31, ASTM E35.15, IBRG Committee on Textiles, and is a consultant for the OECD Task Force on Biocides. Dr. Monticello received a B.S. in Microbiology from Michigan State University and a M.S. in Molecular Biology from Western Michigan University. He obtained his Ph.D. in Biochemistry and Molecular Medicine at the Wayne State University Medical School and completed a Post-Doctoral Fellowship at the Wayne State University Department of Molecular Medicine in Human Gene Therapy.

The IAC developed a Certified Lab Program and works with test labs worldwide and trains technicians how to run the test methods.

"When the IAC talks with brands, for example, we can provide up-to-date information and recommend IAC certified labs," says Monticello. "This is a win for the IAC, a win for the lab, a win for the brand and ultimately a win for consumers."

The IAC is taking the Certified Lab Program to the next level with a new Verification Program. Currently in a phase of development, the Verification Program is projected to launch during the first quarter of 2016, according to Dr. Monticello.

Here he explains some of the reasons for the Program and how it benefits the industry:

"Laboratories can run the test methods correctly but they can use different procedures to do so. When labs use different procedures they generate different test results and this leads to frustration and delayed adoptions by brands. When multiple labs use the same procedures within a given method they are much more likely to generate similar test results. Receiving test results that are similar to those received from a separate lab provides confidence to brand owners allowing them to make adoption decisions more quickly and confidently—both of which greatly benefit the antimicrobial industry.

"The universal adoption of these uniform procedures among laboratories increases the likelihood that laboratory testing on similar samples will produce similar results. Receiving similar results reduces confusion among brand owners thus increasing the adoption rate and reducing the timeframes involved in the adoption of antimicrobials for treated products.

"The IAC's new program verifies that a laboratory has performed the IAC recommended procedures for a given test method providing the lab tech with an electronic procedural checklist that is filled out as the test is set up and then completed. This checklist is then sent to the IAC where it is evaluated. When a lab technician indicates that he/she has successfully applied the IAC procedures within a given method the IAC then emails a verification number to the technician indicating that the laboratory has completed an IAC Verified Test.

"The benefit of having an IAC verified test is that brand owners that use multiple laboratories to perform their microbiological testing on the same test samples will receive comparable test results that accurately reflect the performance of the antimicrobial treated product from multiple laboratories when they use the IAC testing procedures."

The verification test program is administered by the IAC. The cost for the verification of each test is under \$10. According to Dr. Monticello, when informally surveyed, the response from brand owners regarding the need and the cost of test verification has been extremely positive."

He added, "Laboratory responses regarding the test verification was also positive. Feedback regarding the cost was that it would not impact the affordability of the microbiological testing that they perform for their customers." ●

For more details about the IAC, visit the website: www.amcouncil.org.



Robert Monticello, Ph.D
senior technical advisor, IAC