

# HBN: Healthy Building Network ... Or Hardly Believable Nonsense?

We took it upon ourselves to highlight HBN's misleading statements.



## Perkins + Will, HBN, Unravel the Myth of "Clean Vinyl"

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Today, the global architecture firm Perkins+Will [released](#) a white paper, [What's New \(and What's Not\) With PVC](#), which explores the current state of polyvinyl chloride (PVC), written in partnership with the Healthy Building Network.

The vinyl industry has been on a new rebranding campaign: "clean-vinyl" [\[1\]](#) and "bio-vinyl" [\[2\]](#) are two examples of the trade names at the forefront of this campaign to position vinyl as a breakthrough and advanced green product. While some vinyl products have excluded problematic additives, these reformulations have not-and cannot-address the lifecycle hazards tied to PVC's intrinsic chlorinated chemistry.

Irresponsible. Alarmist claims designed to spread fear, not educate readers of the facts.

The white paper concludes that the fundamental hazards inherent in the chemistry of the material cannot be resolved: PVC remains a plastic based on chlorine chemistry. It will always require vinyl chloride monomer; produce dioxins during synthesis, accidental fires during use and in landfill disposal; and, it will continue to present a hazard to building occupants, firefighters, other first responders, and the local community during fires.

Note use of "assert" here to convey a dishonest sense-of-doubt. The data supporting VI's positions are not "assertions" - they are indisputable facts.

Incorrect. VI has accurately reported these statistics. Only 4% of ambient dioxin emissions come from U.S. vinyl manufacturers.

The Vinyl Institute, an industry association for the material, asserts that the industry has cleaned up pollution associated with the production of vinyl. However, our review of US Environmental Protection Agency Toxic Release Inventory data for US PVC plants reveals that dioxin creation is significantly higher than the Vinyl Institute claims. We found that in 2013, total on- and off-site releases of dioxin from PVC manufacturing were more than 1,000% higher than the amounts claimed by the Vinyl Institute. [\[3\]](#) Dioxins are highly potent carcinogens that persist in the environment for many years, and pose a significant hazard to communities around PVC plants.

If dioxin should be a criterion for building material selection, what are HBN's and Perkins + Will's position on, say, steel, iron, cement, brick, tile and electric utilities - all of which are impacted?

More deception. ... The vast majority of PVC in America is sourced by U.S. PVC resin manufacturers, where mercury cell technology was phased out nearly a decade ago.

Further, imported PVC, the source for many building products on the market today, including vinyl flooring, often relies upon chlorine made by facilities that release mercury, an extremely toxic metal [\[4\]](#), into the surrounding communities and environment. The United Nations estimates that 100 chlorine plants across 44 countries are still using mercury cell technologies. [\[5\]](#)

The vinyl industry has been promoting the recyclability of PVC. Again, the industry's assertions are belied by data [recycling rates](#) remain very low (around 1%, at best) [\[6\]](#) and what is being recycled can contain toxic additives like phthalates and heavy metals - the very additives that many new new formulations have been designed to avoid. The recycling process therefore reintroduces these toxic additives to new vinyl products [\[7\]](#). Typo

In the U.S. alone, some 1 billion pounds of vinyl are recycled each year. HBN defines this as "low" ... ?

HBN hides from readers that PVC has been certified to meet rigorous NSF International standards for drinking water, as recommended by EPA.

What's New (and What's Not) With PVC explains that PVC has been on Perkins+Will's [Precautionary List](#) since 2008, "because the weight of the evidence at that time suggested precaution, and market evidence suggested that in virtually every product category there were materials available that were superior from an environmental and human health perspective." Seven years later, Perkins+Will determined that, given the weight of the evidence gathered by HBN for this report, PVC should remain on its Precautionary List. HBN agrees.

Where, then, is the epidemiological evidence showing any exposure harm whatsoever to recycling plant workers? HBN can't point to any...

... which should surprise no one since Perkins + Will's Principal, Robin Guenther, also chairs HBN's board of directors. Readers are right to question the scientific integrity of HBN's findings given Ms. Guenther's ideologically rigid opposition to PVC. (Ms. Guenther also serves as a Senior Advisor to the staunch anti-PVC organization, Health Care Without Harm.)