



**In an ever more competitive marketplace, the makers of decorative paints often rely on unique selling points to make their products stand out. Some companies however, may be misleading consumers with unsubstantiated green claims about their products. The British Coatings Federation (BCF), the UK's Trade Association representing decorative paint manufacturers, aims to help create a level playing field for the industry by debunking and fact checking some of these claims.**

### Non-Toxic

The use of the phrase 'Non-Toxic' is intended to imply that other widely-available competitor's paints in the market are 'toxic' / contain hazardous materials. This is false and misleading. The European paint industry prides itself on how decorative water-based wall paint formulations have been developed over the past few decades to ensure that hazardous components have been removed or minimised, to ensure that DIY users can use our products safely and without concerns over the impact to their health. The vast majority of decorative wall and ceiling paints sold on the UK market do not require any hazard statements or pictograms on their labelling (in accordance with legislation), and hence may be deemed non-hazardous / non-toxic.

Similarly, the term 'Chemical-free' is misleading, as all paint products, regardless of the raw materials used or whether they are labelled as hazardous are chemical-based products and are required to comply with relevant chemical legislation.

### Toy Safe

If a product claims to have been tested and accredited to 'Toy Safe' standards, it needs to be against the latest standard. Some manufacturers quote older standards, as far back as 1995 in some cases. The standard has been updated many times since then with new safety limits to comply with, these limits are regularly reviewed as more safety data becomes available. It is therefore important to check with the supplier, evidence that they are accredited to the most recent standard, currently the 2021 version, quoted as 'BS EN 71-3:2019 + A1:2021', otherwise they could be well above the legally permitted migration levels that are currently accepted.

In addition, under toy safety legislation it is the final toy that needs to be tested against the relevant standards. Whilst a coating can be tested to the part of the British Standard relevant to the migration of certain chemical elements, the coating supplier cannot know how the toy manufacturer has used their product.

### Lead Free

The retail sale of all lead-containing decorative coatings to the general public has been prohibited for use in decorative paints in the UK for more than 40 years. Lead pigments were taken out of most paints in the 1960s, and lead pigments and driers (at very low levels) were completely removed from decorative paints by the early 1980s. The BCF, Defra and the Department for Business therefore agree that companies should not be making claims confirming the absence of lead in retail decorative coatings, given that this is a legislative requirement. BCF members also apply this restriction to decorative coatings supplied for professional use. As a result, claims such as 'lead free' and 'this product contains no added lead' should not be made, as they are considered misleading to consumers and in breach of the [UK Green Claims Code](#).

Generally, an environmental claim such as 'does not contain substance X' for a particular decorative paint does not reflect any benefit to the environment or safety when this substance is already prohibited due to legislation and would be considered misleading to consumers.

### Planet Friendly

This is a common green-washing claim. Companies in BCF membership strive to employ the most sustainable practices, and have recently pledged towards Net Zero by 2050. The industry has also committed to a highly ambitious target for its paint recycling scheme, PaintCare. This scheme, which aims to create a circular economy for leftover decorative paint in the UK will aim to increase the percentage of leftover paint re-used, recycled, or re-manufactured from 2% today to 75% by 2030. Coatings protect the surfaces they are applied to, preserving valuable resources such as metal and wood, and play an important role in achieving future goals surrounding sustainability. However, making claims such as 'Planet Friendly' or 'Prevents Climate Change' in the marketplace are misleading and false, as manufacturing paint requires energy in the first place. Since the 1990s the coatings industry has made considerable strides in reducing carbon footprint, which is highlighted in a March 2020 report from WWF.

### Organic/Eco-Friendly

Possibly the most commonly used consumer product claim is 'eco-friendly' or 'green' which are broad statements with no scientific proof to back them up. As descriptors for paint products, these words, often misappropriated from the food industry, are too vague to adequately describe paint. These buzz words may attract attention of consumers, but are meaningless and often signal little but green wash.

Next time you see an 'organic' paint, remember that all paint is organic by its definition as it's derived from carbon. Similarly, when you come across paint described as 'natural' keep in mind that this term symbolises an unmodified product derived from nature but to make paint, there are physical and chemical processes involved to modify the ingredients. The sourcing of 'natural' raw materials, such as titanium dioxide and calcium carbonate for lime-based paint will involve processes that can be energy intensive. This should be taken into consideration as part of the whole life cycle of the product when environmental claims are being made.

### Not tested on animals

No paint manufacturers test any products sold to householders on animals; The chemicals used within all chemical products may have been historically tested on animals due to the requirements of EU and UK chemicals legislation, but only when this testing is absolutely necessary and the data required is not available via other sources. This will be true for all chemical-based products and not just paint. The final product itself will not have been tested on animals and claims of this nature are misleading as it suggests that competitors in the market not making these claims are testing their products on animals.

### Vegan

Paints are mostly made from synthetic chemicals and inorganic minerals and so should be vegan. There are some that contain natural ingredients; however, these are usually of vegetable origin (e.g. soya oil). Some ingredients used in paints could be derived from animal sources, for example glycerol, which, is used to create a basic ingredient of some paints; casein, which is derived from animal milk, and lanolin waxes (from sheep).

No paints in the UK are tested on animals. However, due to the requirements of the REACH Regulation, it may be that some chemical substances used in paints have had to be tested on animals by law (which is the same for any chemical-containing product).

### Zero VOC and VOC Free

Volatile Organic Compounds (VOCs) are essentially solvents that are emitted as vapours into the air from certain products or processes. Some VOCs can be harmful and the decorative paint market has significantly reduced the presence of these VOCs in their products over the last two decades, with 84% of decorative paints now sold on the market being water-based. All paint sold in the UK and EU has strict VOC limits placed on them by regulation that manufacturers have to comply with. The VOC content is required by law to be communicated on the product label, even if present in very low amounts.

The British Coatings Federation takes the position that the use of the terms 'Zero-VOC' and 'VOC-free' are false claims and should not be used in the paint industry. There will always be a trace element of VOCs, even if no raw materials containing VOCs have been added. Even water can contain trace amounts of VOC, supply chains for the manufacture of paint are often complex and VOCs, even at negligible amounts, can also be introduced during any part of the process, through using raw materials that naturally contain VOCs, to processes that introduce VOCs, such as washing raw materials.

It is impossible to ensure that every batch of paint is completely free of VOCs, just like it is impossible to ensure that every batch of a chocolate bar is nut-free because of the potential for trace nuts to be introduced at any point throughout the supply chain. Which is why 'May contain traces of nuts' is added to the labelling of chocolate. Similarly, BCF members have now adopted the use of the statement 'TRACE' VOC as part of the BCF VOC Globe scheme to improve communication to consumers highlighting which products have the lowest levels of VOCs. The 'TRACE' globe will be launched on the 1st May 2022.



Our guide can viewed at:  
[coatings.org.uk/greenclaims](https://coatings.org.uk/greenclaims)

British Coatings Federation, Spectra House, Westwood Way, Westwood Business Park, Coventry, CV4 8HS  
Tel: 024 7693 5390  
Email: [info@bcf.co.uk](mailto:info@bcf.co.uk)  
[www.coatings.org.uk](http://www.coatings.org.uk)