

Millyard firm on fast-forward

New Image's deck products gain, offering sales from NH to Hawaii

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A 2-YEAR-OLD Millyard-based startup that bucks the trend for deck treatments and wood or concrete waterproofing products said it will soon have its Seal-Once waterproofers available at the Agway chain of lawn and garden stores.

It's a deal with huge potential — 550 stores in New England and the mid-Atlantic states — for New Image Coatings LLC, which had already enjoyed considerable growth over the past year.

Major-brand competitors have one thing in common — strict toxicity warnings and environmental concerns printed on their labels. New Image's products are non-toxic, and the company says it is now working on marketing Seal-Once, which is also far more durable than similar products, as a premium product in a largely commodified industry.

In the first half of 2006, the company's sales have topped its sales for all of 2005, and Seal-Once has gone from being available just in New Hampshire to nine states across the country. In its first two years, Seal-Once has, indeed, sprinted out of the gate from its 150 Dow St. location. New Image coatings has:

- Established more than 45 retail partners, including hardware stores across New Hampshire and 125 individual Standard Hardware locations;
- Added three news sales agencies

covering states from Maine to Florida to the West Coast and Hawaii;

- Gained the New Hampshire Department of Environmental Services stamp of approval for use of its products over water;
- Attained product listing in Green-Spec, an independent, Vermont-based product information service which provides information about ecofriendly building products.

Strength underfoot

Besides eco-friendliness, the company touts its products' durability. "If you have to do something every single year, you accept it. It becomes S.O.P.," said Hank Croteau, the president of New Image Coatings, describing what many deck owners go through to keep their decks in good condition. "We're trying to break that pattern."

"Not just stains but also clear (waterproofers) — they say reapply every six months to a year," Croteau said. "We warranty our products on an horizontal surface for six years, whether it's clear or treated. On a vertical surface, it's ten years."

The trick behind Seal-Once's success is its chemical formula, originated by chemist Mike Cork and Visco Inc. of Nebraska. Simply put, the stuff sinks into surfaces, whether it's brick, wood, concrete or granite.

As a result, it keeps the underlying surface moisture-free. Other

waterproofers do not penetrate as deeply and tend to wear off the surface quicker.

"The only way you'll find moisture getting in is if you walk off the product so (the walk off the product so (the wear) gets below the coverage line. That's why it lasts so long," said David Myler, New Image's vice president of operations.

Toxicity

Besides durability, the other major trouble with other waterproofers on the market, as the as the company sees it, is toxicity — other waterproofers can prove harmful or fatal to humans if inhaled or swallowed, and are also flammable. Seal-Once's non-toxic, nonflammable properties come from its water base, as opposed to other products, which are based on solvents or petroleum distillates.

Independent toxicity tests the company had performed using Seal-Once also found the products had no toxic effects on fish and shrimp larvae — which are 1,000 times as sensitive to toxicity as a goldfish.

While state environment regulators forbid spraying the product directly over water, they have said the company's toxicity tests show the product is environmentally friendly to be used on all surfaces that reside over water.

"Used within the label conditions, there are no constituents in



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the product at levels of concern or levels that would impact water quality," a state DES official wrote to the company official wrote to the company in 2004 to confirm the product's suitability for marine applications.

Value over time

The Seal-Once line of products retails for between \$41.99 and \$46.99 per gallon, more than most of the company's competitors. For instance, a gallon of Cabot decking stain goes for between \$26.99 and \$31.99 at major hardware retailers, according to a Froogle search. Thompson Waterseal products, another well-known brand, were generally in \$15 to \$20 range. As for Consumer Reports, it listed prices between \$15 and \$33.

However, New Image believes it has a good selling point about price. The company argues that when one adds up the cost and time of applying multiple deck treatments over the years — or, in many cases, paying someone else to apply those treatments — the Seal-Once will prove cheaper in the end.

Among the products under development are a Seal-Once waterproofer which also provides termite protection, as well as one which will also guard against sun damage. The company said it is also testing to see how Seal-Once products might work on plastic decking material.