

Solvent Debate Part II

I, an insider in the large format printing industry, have had to learn a whole lot about chemicals in the last five years. I however find myself alarmed at the play on words that has developed over the same period.

Light, mild, eco, true, hard solvents. Marketeers are playing word games and I am no less guilty than the rest. (Hind sight makes us all wiser)

Definition: In chemistry, a solution is one or more substance (the solute) dissolved in another substance (the solvent) forming a homogeneous mixture. A common example would be salt dissolving in water (seawater)

Now the marketeers have perverted True to mean smelly and dangerous, and light, mild and eco to mean friendly or even worse still, safe. The two camps playing with your minds.

The real issues are lost in a cloud of counter claims having nothing to do with the properties of the ink and what advantages and disadvantages each ink really has. The measure of an ink is as follows.

1. Environmental safety.
2. Human safety.
3. Colour gamut.
4. Scratch resistance.
5. Alcohol Resistance
6. Density
7. Odor
8. Outdoor Durability
9. Flash point (explosion safety)
10. Drying time.
11. Costs (this importantly includes purge, cleaning cycles and blockage)

Now some manufacturers have pushed the friendliness of their inks to humans and the environment and have made advancements year on year in improving the overall performance of these inks on this 11 point scale, with major improvements on the overall friendliness of the ink. (Vuteks new Corn Starch inks and Roland's Eco Max inks being good examples.)

However market demands, competitive pressure and new head technology are a counter balance and some compromises have always been made. How do these impact on you the user?

You the users need to unite and demand access to the Material safety sheets (MSDS) and to make an informed decisions about the ink and the result you are trying to achieve. It needs to be a wholistic approach with the properties and the risks being fully understood.

It is no good having an ink based on xylene or cyclohexanol if you do not take adequate precautions to prevent the huge risk of death and dementia due to over exposure to these chemicals.

Just as bad is exposure to less aggressive chemicals in the mild, and light solvents

because due to marketing messages you feel safer. Its no good for large format suppliers to claim that you are exposed to more dangerous chemicals in your home.

Safety comes from understanding, so inform yourselves. Demand the supplier explains the risks, you after-all only live once and the environment is fragile, do not dam your kids and their kids to a job of cleaning up after you.

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