Sustainability is Always in Style:
NSF/ANSI 342 Sustainability Assessment Standard for Wallcoverings Helps Transform an Industry

presented by NSF Sustainability

Sustainability Standards Revealed

As demand for sustainable products increases, the definition of "sustainable" expands as well, encompassing many different interpretations by consumers, industry and government. The NSF Sustainability Standards provide clarity and transparency by establishing uniform technical requirements, methods, processes and practices. They address sustainability throughout the product life cycle, from manufacture to use and disposal.

Sustainability standards help eliminate greenwashing, lower investment risks in green innovations and encourage the use of truly sustainable products. Sustainability standards are often initiated by industry trade associations, and are sometimes adopted as governmental regulations or product purchasing specifications. Importantly, sustainability standards are not static, but evolve over time to reflect changes in industry knowledge, technology and marketplace expectations. Sustainability standards are not just informative tools for the marketplace; they can be transformative guides for the industries involved.

By choosing products certified as more sustainable, architects and designers continue pushing the boundaries of sustainability in green building. Specifying certified products can meet client requirements, uphold internal or external standards for sustainable design and build demand for more sustainable products.

In response to Executive Order (E.O.) 13514, the U.S. Government Services Administration (GSA) is also driving demand for certified sustainable products. A key goal of the E.O. is for 95 percent of all applicable contracts for products and services to meet sustainability requirements. The GSA has already adopted certification to NSF/ANSI 140: *Sustainability Assessment for Carpet* as a purchasing requirement. As new sustainability standards are created and implemented by industry, the expectation is that GSA will adopt more standards as purchasing requirements.

NSF/ANSI 342 in a Nutshell

NSF/ANSI 342: *Sustainability Assessment for Wallcovering Products* is the foremost standard to evaluate and certify the sustainability of wallcoverings. Manufacturers and distributors earn points for key criteria, and their combined totals certify a product as Conformant, Silver, Gold or Platinum.

Unique to NSF/ANSI 342: Combined Manufacturer and Distributor Points

NSF/ANSI 342: *Sustainability Assessment for Wallcovering Products* is the foremost standard to evaluate and certify the sustainability of wallcovering products such as textiles, vinyl, alternative polymer (or vinyl- or alternative polymer-coated), paper and other natural fiber products.

This American national standard sets a certification level for environmentally preferable and sustainable wallcovering products. The standard employs quantifiable metrics and performance criteria across the product life cycle, from raw material extraction through manufacturing, distribution, its use and end-of-life management.

Similar to LEED certification for buildings, this standard assigns point values to prerequisite requirements and elective criteria in a number of categories. Unique to this standard is the requirement to combine points from both the manufacturer and distributor to determine the certification level as Conformant, Silver, Gold or Platinum. Each organization is responsible for its own rating and applies individually.

Manufacturers are evaluated on categories including:

- Raw material inputs
- Indoor air quality
- Product recyclability
- Energy use

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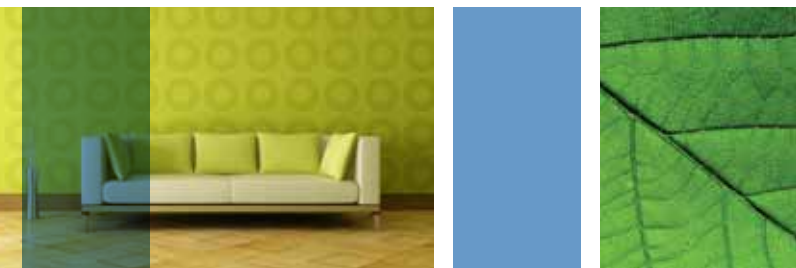
Distributors must follow environmentally-preferable practices in areas including:

- Product distribution
- Recycling infrastructure support
- Waste minimization
- Corporate governance

NSF/ANSI 342: Developed by and for Industry

NSF/ANSI 342 is not a standard imposed *on* industry; it's a standard developed through support *by* industry. Manufacturers and distributors of wallcoverings wanted to formalize their best practices in sustainable design, manufacture and product distribution into an official wallcoverings standard. This effort was spearheaded by the Wallcoverings Association and developed through a consensus-based process by NSF International and a joint committee of users, regulatory agencies, the Environmental Protection Agency, wallcovering manufacturers, distributors and academics.

Combined Manufacturer and Distributor Certification

Like a chain-of-custody certification, the NSF/ANSI 342 standard requires participation from both the manufacturer and the distributor. The product certification rating is a *combination* of the individual point totals of the manufacturer and the distributor. This means the *same product* could carry *different certification levels* based on the specific manufacturer-distributor pairing.

For example, let's say Wallcoverings Inc. received 160 points for its Spring Blossoms product line. Distributor A has earned 37 points, while Distributor B and Distributor C have earned 20 points each. Spring Blossoms products

Combined Manufacturer and Distributor Rating

Product certification to NSF/ANSI 342 is determined through compliance by *both* a manufacturer and a distributor.

sold through Distributor A will carry a Platinum certification (combined points equal 197, which is greater than the 195 minimum required for Platinum). The exact same Spring Blossoms products sold by Distributors B and C will carry a Gold certification (combined point totals of the manufacturer and each of these distributors is 180, which is less than the 195 required for Platinum, so each certification is Gold).

Transparent Criteria, Easy Comparisons

The standard allows transparency regarding conformance requirements, enabling straight-forward marketplace comparisons. The process for product certification is comprehensive, but the rating system (Conformant, Silver, Gold or Platinum) is easy to understand and interpret.

NSF/ANSI 342 is a multi-attribute standard that evaluates wallcoverings against established requirements, performance criteria and quantifiable metrics in six key areas:

- **Product Design:** Encourages integrating environmental and life-cycle thinking into the design process. As much as 90 percent of a product's sustainability footprint is determined in the design phase, so this important category is weighted heavily in the point assignments.

- **Product Manufacturing:** Requires quantifying and reducing the environmental impacts of manufacturing and distribution. Because of the potential environmental impacts in the manufacturing phase, this category is also weighted heavily in point assignments.

- **Long-Term Value:** Encourages maximizing product longevity that equates to less waste and fewer resources used.

- **End-of-Life Management:** Ensures that wallcoverings can be collected, processed, recycled and/or composted within the existing materials recycling infrastructure.
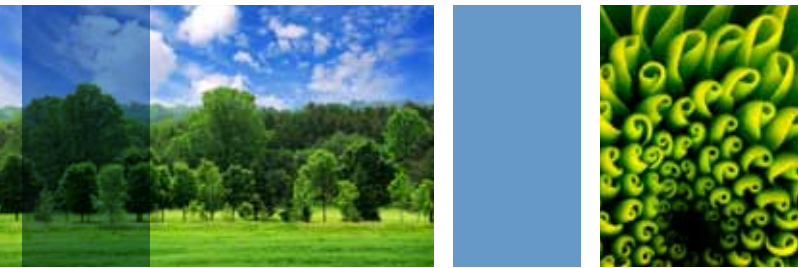
- **Corporate Governance:** Supports corporate social responsibility such as providing a desirable workplace, being involved in the local community and demonstrating financial health.

- **Innovation:** Rewards exceptional performance above the basic requirements of NSF/ANSI 342.

Product certification is only met through compliance by both a manufacturer and a distributor. Each is responsible for its own rating and applies individually. Certification is granted for three years, with two annual surveillances and a recertification audit in the third year.

Benefits for Architects and Designers

NSF/ANSI 342 certification gives architects and designers a way of identifying and comparing sustainable products. The ratings allow flexibility in choosing not just the product, but the manufacturer and distributor pairing most suitable for meeting specific project requirements.

Sustainability assessment standards help the Architect and Design community to:

- Identify more sustainable products as well as manufacturers and distributors committed to advancing sustainability

- Choose preferred vendors based on product ratings

- Meet clients' sustainability requirements

- Position their firms as more sustainable through their commitment to certified products

Benefits to Wallcoverings Industry

NSF/ANSI 342 gives manufacturers and distributors the framework to produce more sustainable products and become a more sustainable operation. It also favorably positions companies who choose to self regulate ahead of the competition if the U.S. General Services Administration and other purchasing authorities adopt the wallcovering standard, as GSA did with NSF/ANSI 140 for carpeting.

Contact Us

For more information about NSF/ANSI sustainability assessment standards or certification to NSF/ANSI 342, please contact NSF at (734) 476-2543, internationally at 00+1 (734) 476-2543 or by e-mail at sustainability@nsf.org.

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About NSF International

NSF International has been testing and certifying products for safety, health and the environment for more than 65 years (www.nsf.org). As an independent organization, NSF's mission is to protect public health and the environment through standards development, inspection, management systems auditing, testing and certification for industries including food, water, building materials, retail, chemicals, automotive, aerospace, consumer products and health sciences. Operating in more than 120 countries, NSF is committed to protecting public health worldwide.

NSF Sustainability draws upon this expertise in standards development, product assurance and certification, advisory services and management systems to help companies green their products, operations, systems and supply chains. NSF, through the National Center for Sustainability Standards, has developed sustainability standards for green chemicals, building products and materials and drinking water quality. NSF works with leading regulators, scientists, engineers, public health and environmental health professionals and industry representatives to develop these transparent, consensus-based standards.