

5 steps bodyshops can take to improve environmental sustainability

Joachim Hinz, Spies Hecker's brand manager for Europe, the Middle East and Africa, addresses the importance of environmental sustainability and offers guidance on what bodyshops can do to improve it.



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The environment - a main pillar of sustainability - is under threat from climate change. The groundswell of increased urgency around this means that it is vital for the refinish industry to achieve the right balance of economic growth, environmental care and social responsibility. Car owners are mindful of their choices, and increasingly shrewd about the green credentials of businesses.

Hinz says: "We are at a critical point where businesses must demonstrate environmental awareness in their practices if they want to stay profitable and attractive to today's environmentally-savvy customer. For bodyshop owners, there are five concrete ways to implement green-thinking from a 360-degree perspective."

Assessment

The first step towards environmental awareness involves a holistic assessment of existing business practices. Hinz continues: "Bodyshop owners should take stock of the products and accessory materials they use as well as the processes they have in place for everything, from the refinish work to the disposal of hazardous waste."

Are employees following the most efficient processes and working with minimal materials and resources? Are they properly trained and supported in using the latest low energy systems? Are there newer and more environmentally-responsible options available on the market?

Are guidelines for hazardous waste being followed? Once they have a clear picture of where they stand, they can identify where there is room for improvement.”

Low-energy products

A commitment to improved environmental sustainability can be achieved by opting for products that allow repairs to be carried out with speed and efficiency. “Once an assessment has been carried out, the next step in a green-thinking approach can be something as simple as choosing the right products.”

Training

Environmental awareness is something that should be shared across the bodyshop. Choosing easy-to-use and energy efficient paint systems is key, but it is equally important to make sure that refinishers are trained in using the products and know how to use accessory materials.

“The third step is all about minimising waste. The less material waste a bodyshop generates, the better it is for the environment and the better it is for the bottom line. When refinishers are fully trained and well-informed about a product, application is easier and throughput is increased.”

Waste reduction and disposal

The fourth aspect of environmental sustainability that should underpin the refinish industry involves disposal of any hazardous waste that is generated. Bodyshops must adhere to local laws and EU regulations on the disposal of the products that they use, not only for the health and safety of their employees but also for the benefit and protection of the environment.

Hinz explains: “Anything that has been exposed to paint is considered hazardous, whether it’s a cleaning wipe or rubber gloves. Improperly emptied containers, for example, are considered hazardous waste, and fully drained containers are classified as controlled waste. It’s crucial to make sure that both are kept away from drains and watercourses and disposed of in accordance with environmental regulations.”

Pick the right partner

The fifth and last step in a bodyshop’s journey towards environmental sustainability looks outward at partners, suppliers and other vendors.

Hinz concludes by urging bodyshops to align with like-minded organisations. “As the saying goes, you are only as good as the company you keep, so it is key for bodyshops to affiliate with organisations that will encourage, support and further their efforts to go green. Today, no business is too large or too small to take stock of its environmental impact.”

Ultimately, by choosing the right products, the right people and the right processes, the refinish industry can do its part to protect the environment.

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