



## Paint it Green! Eco-Art Supplies

By Katie Ross

### Background

#### Introduction

Art is a vital part of our lives; why not also make it green? Art supplies are usually not considered detrimental to the environment, but most supplies contain dangerous toxins and pollutants that are both harmful to both students' health and the environment. Luckily, art supplies have gone green too!

#### Environmental Impact of Art Supplies

Though artistic endeavors can involve as many toxic chemicals as a chemistry experiment, we are often unaware of the hazards these materials pose to our health and the health of the earth. Many art supplies used in the classroom contain persistent, bioaccumulative, toxic chemicals (PBTs), or can generate or release PBTs into the environment when they are made, used, or discarded.<sup>1</sup> PBTs persist in the environment and accumulate in body tissue, increasing in concentration as they move through the food chain, posing a risk to human health and ecosystems.<sup>2</sup>

Exposure to dangerous chemicals in art supplies can cause acute or chronic illnesses in children such as: headaches, breathing problems, nausea, burns, lung and kidney damage, and even cancer.<sup>3</sup> The adverse effects of childhood exposure to toxic materials are compounded by children's' smaller size, immature organ and immune systems, and higher metabolic rates. These factors lower children's tolerance for exposure to hazardous materials and therefore make eco-friendly art supplies that much more important.<sup>4</sup>

#### Go Green!

A great way to solve this problem and prevent negative affects of art supplies is to make sure your school is only purchasing sustainable, non-toxic art supplies. Another great approach is to incorporate items that might otherwise be destined for the landfill in your art projects. Greening your school's art has innumerable benefits for your school. Incorporating recycled materials into your art projects reduces the amount of new materials your school needs to purchase for art education programs, thereby saving the



Source: Earth Day Network's School Greening Project, Sullivan Elementary School, Phoenix, AZ.

school money. Reusing old materials stimulates creativity, teaching students to look for new uses for old things.

Here are some best practices on how to incorporate environmentally friendly into your art class:

- **Post-Consumer Recycled Materials**

Your masterpiece will look just as good on recycled paper as it would on virgin paper. Thus, when you search for that perfect sketchbook, make sure it's made from 100 percent post-consumer recycled paper. Or, if that's not your style, try paper made from hemp, a fast growing alternative to trees.

- **Natural and Recycled Ingredients**

Did you know that traditional crayons are made from paraffin wax, a petroleum by-product?<sup>5</sup> Though these crayons are non-toxic, petroleum is a non-renewable resource. A more eco-friendly choice would be crayons made from soy bean oil. Soy crayons are biodegradable and are made from soy beans, a sustainable and renewable resource.<sup>6</sup>

When you pull out that 100 percent post-consumer recycled sketchbook, make sure your pencil is earth friendly too. Look for pencils made from sustainably harvested wood and recycled newspapers – not dying forests.

- **Recycled Materials in your Artwork**

Why not try a trash-to-treasure art project? Instead of using new materials for your next art project, use things you might otherwise throw away. Don't know what to do with those old newspapers and magazines? Use them to make some beautiful [paper beads](#). Got milk cartons? With a little creativity, you could have a [birdhouse](#) that will have the birds singing. Lose another sock in the laundry? Turn its lonely partner into a friendly [sock puppet](#). The possibilities are endless!

- **Make Your Own Supplies**

Can't find recycled paper? Use scrap paper, newspapers, and magazines to [make your own paper](#). Want to get your hands dirty but you cannot find eco-friendly finger paints? You can make your own non-toxic finger paints from [cornstarch](#), [flour](#), or even [pudding](#)! Brushing up on your water-color skills is easy with earth friendly [homemade water colors](#). You can be just as creative making your art supplies as you can using them!

## **Green Art Certification**

To ensure that your art supplies are safe for you and the planet, look for the Art & Creative Materials Institute ([ACMI](#)) seal of approval. An ACMI Approved Product (AP) Seal “identifies art materials that are safe and that are certified to contain no materials in sufficient quantities to be toxic or injurious to humans, including children, or to cause acute or chronic health problems.”<sup>7</sup> A guide to reading and understanding art supply labels can be found at the [Children's Health Environmental Coalition](#).

## Green Art Supply Stores

- [Green Home Environmental Store](#). Everything from recycled construction paper to organic play-dough.
- [EcoArt Works](#). Offers hemp paper, beeswax crayons and other natural products.
- [Dixon Ticonderoga](#). Sells soybean crayons and other non-toxic art supplies.
- [TreeSmart](#), [O'BON](#), and [Smencils](#). These sites have graphite and colored pencils made from rolled, recycled newspapers.
- [Stubby Pencil Studio](#). This site has a variety of green art supplies.
- [Eco Art Supplies](#). Displays green fine arts supplies like oil paints and modeling clay.
- [EcoPaper](#). Carries tree-free paper made from post-consumer content and other materials like coffee, mangoes, and bananas.

## Earth Day Network Resources

- [Action Plan](#)
- [Lesson Plan](#)

## Additional Resources

- [Children's Health Environmental Coalition guidelines for art and hobby supplies](#)
- [Database of health and safety info for artists](#)

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<sup>1</sup> INFORM. *Art Departments: Products Containing Persistent, Bioaccumulative, Toxic Chemicals (PBTs)*. <http://www.informinc.org/fsart.pdf>

<sup>2</sup> EPA. *About PBTs*. <http://www.epa.gov/pbt/pubs/aboutpbt.htm>

<sup>3</sup> Co-op America. *Are Art Supplies Toxic?* <http://www.coopamerica.org/pubs/realmoney/articles/toxicart.cfm>

<sup>4</sup> California Office of Environmental Health Hazard Assessment. (2007). *Guidelines for the Safe Use of Art and Craft Supplies*. Sacramento, CA: Office of Environmental Health Hazard Assessment. [http://www.oehha.org/education/pdf\\_zip/GUIDE2007.pdf](http://www.oehha.org/education/pdf_zip/GUIDE2007.pdf)

<sup>5</sup> Crayola. *How Crayola Crayons are Made*. [http://www.crayola.com/factory/preview/factory\\_floor/crayon\\_mfg.htm](http://www.crayola.com/factory/preview/factory_floor/crayon_mfg.htm)

<sup>6</sup> All Soy Products. *Soy Crayons*. from <http://www.all-soy-products.com/a50-soy-crayons.php>

<sup>7</sup> Art & Creative Materials Institute. *Safety*. <http://www.acminet.org/Safety.htm#three>