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Klippert makes countertop even his mother can love

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Photo courtesy of Klip BioTechnologies [\[enlarge\]](#)

Joel Klippert's firm, Klip BioTechnologies, has developed a new green countertop designed to appeal to more mainstream consumers.

When Joel Klippert of Klip BioTechnologies created the eco-friendly PaperStone countertop material seven years ago, his parents were the only ones who would invest in his company. Once Klippert's Puyallup-based company was stable, he offered to thank his mom by replacing her countertops — for free. Just one problem: she said no.

That, Klippert said, “slapped me upside the head. My mom was like ‘Oh son, that is so great... and I really appreciate what you're doing for the environment but... your stuff's kind of ugly.’”

Klippert said his mom's refusal made him realize his product lacked mass-market appeal. He decided it was time for “a paradigm shift in my marketplace,” to make a mainstream green product.

Klippert showed off his new product, EcoTop surfaces, at a meeting this week of the Seattle LEED User's Group. He was joined by others representing products including Gene Berg of Forbo Flooring Systems, Bryan Ripka of EcoTimber, Ameer Quiriconi of Tiger Mountain Innovations and Thor Skov of MicroPlanet. They shared tips on how to choose green products, and talked about what's changed in the developing and marketing of green building products.

One thing that's changed, Klippert said, is the level of interest from investors. "Five years ago you couldn't beg these people for money. You had to give them your first three kids," he said. "Now it has gone completely the other way."

In developing EcoTop, Klippert said he partnered with Arklin Surfaces, a resin manufacturer, and spent several million dollars on research and testing. EcoTop uses a petroleum-free, water-based resin. It is made of rapidly renewable bamboo fiber and Forest Stewardship Council-certified recycled wood fiber salvaged from demolition sites.

Unlike his past products, EcoTop comes in light colors, something his mother was looking for. It is also more durable and is UV-stable so it won't change color under strong light. EcoTop was introduced six months ago and is going out to distributors this month.

So far, he said, it's selling well. "Here is everyone talking about the market crashing and we can't make stuff fast enough," Klippert said. Even his mom is happy with her new EcoTop counters.

Berg of Forbo said his product, marmoleum, also has seen a big jump in sales thanks to the green movement. At the current rate of growth, it could make sense to build a factory in the U.S., he said, rather than ship the flooring material from Scotland or The Netherlands.

But with the growing interest in green products there has also been more "green washing," or misrepresenting a product as environmentally friendly when it is not. Speakers cautioned attendees to do their homework when choosing a green product.

For example, Ripka of EcoTimber said many companies are FSC-certified and splash the logo on their marketing materials, but just because a company is certified doesn't mean its products are. It is the responsibility of the buyer to check that a specific wood is FSC-certified.

"It's really important for you to do your due diligence," he said. "There's a lot of misleading propaganda in the marketplace."

Berg said when vendors show products, customers should also ask to see their literature, certifications and independent testing. Choosing a truly green product, he said, requires detailed information on how it is created.

“How green is green?” he said. “How's the manufacturing? How do you obtain your raw materials? There's a lot of different issues that are factored into it.”

Brent Laws, an environmental scientist at Kane Environmental, said the meeting was useful, especially the emphasis on green washing, which he wants to learn more about. “Just because it says it's green doesn't mean it's true.”

Speakers said it is also important to keep improving products. Quiriconi of Tiger Mountain Innovations used to be a consultant, but transitioned to manufacturer to make Squak Mountain Stone. The stone is made of recycled paper, recycled glass and cement, and is cut into slabs for countertops.

Originally, the product used Portland cement but Quiriconi said the company moved to using low carbon cement, which is heated at a lower temperature to produce less CO₂.

Quiriconi also developed the product to be affordable. “A lot of times, you have to make choices... (people say) this is a really great product but I can't afford it,” she said.

Joan Kenton, business development manager of EHS International, said the presentation was a great example of what entrepreneurs are doing; she was impressed with Quiriconi's story.

Kenton, who is from the Midwest originally, said the Pacific Northwest is the perfect place to try out new products, but they need to sell nationally to really succeed. “It would make a big difference if they could get it to the mass marketplace.”
