Addressing “alternative material constructed wallcovering specification” submitted by Jeff Rezin

Original Proposed change to NSF 342 Durability:

7.2.1 Durability
The manufacturer shall receive eight points for providing documentation showing that the product performs at or above all of the following industry-recognized standards, or equivalent. The standards that are relevant to the specific product:
- ASTM F7935
- CCC-W-408D8
- W-10130
- Tensile Strength – ASTM D-5034
- Tear Strength – ASTM D-2261
- Abrasion Resistance – ASTM D-3884
- Colorfastness – AATCC-168

These test procedures can be performed in an internal or external laboratory that demonstrates a quality program with written test procedures including the performance of equipment calibration. The test results at the time of certification that show compliance will remain in place until there is a product or processing change that is significant enough to impact compliance to the standard's requirements. Any needed modification/improvement on the method shall be performed as described and validated within the method. If alternate methods are used they shall be validated as equivalent or better in precision and accuracy than the specified method.

New Developments regarding durability and the effort to allow alternatives to vinyl to achieve credits for testing product to specifications:

The task group that was originally formed to address 7.2.1 Durability has been meeting at Wallcovering Association Technical Committee meetings and has produced an alternative to the W 101 which was made to specifically address vinyl wallcovering constructions.

W-101 Variation for Non-Vinyl Wallcovering Products – A New Perspective

For well over a year, the Wallcovering Association’s Technical Committee has been struggling to respond to inquiries regarding specifications for Non-Vinyl Wallcovering Products. They continue to receive inquires for specification testing for multiple materials other than the vinyl substrates that have become the industry standard. This has put the committee in the uncomfortable position of having to establish material quality specifications around products that are using materials that do not have the established history of vinyl products. That doesn’t make them necessarily bad or of a lower quality, but the empirical evidence of their performance is not clear.

The W-101 specification has several decades long history. Vinyl has demonstrated performance for quality and aesthetics and became the primary workhorse of the commercial wallcovering industry. However, the current specification is difficult to adapt to other wallcovering constructions. It is problematic to establish specifications for products that have little or no wallcovering history. The W-101 is the only wallcovering specification currently available with a group managing its updates, the WA Technical Committee. Therefore, it is not surprising that alternative material wallcovering manufacturers would post inquiries to this standard and ask how these other materials should be compared for performance.

In order to fairly evaluate these non-vinyl products, additional information is required. The committee felt strongly that the costs for testing should not fall on the Association, but should be provided by the manufactures of these products. Additionally, if some of these materials are able to surpass performance criteria and introduce a better product into the marketplace, that needs to be documented.
Another issue of concern is that the current specification could be interpreted as an innovation suppressant and impede new wallcovering constructions introduction to potential interested parties. Vinyl was not always the preferred material in the history of wallcovering products and if something were good enough to replace it in the future, it is an opportunity the industry would not want to miss. Therefore, the current best material specification is the W-101 for vinyl wallcovering. The Technical Committee felt that should be considered the baseline for any type of constructed wallcovering product. Certain parameters might be different for an alternative construction, for instance, the weight may be lower in a product that has a lower specific gravity even if the thickness is the same. The committee has therefore recommended using the W-101 as the baseline for material specifications with the understanding that particular parameters would most likely be different, especially weight.

Also discussed was the concern that trying to include non-vinyl products in a specification designed for vinyl would not be clearly understood in the marketplace. A parallel document, W-102 was suggested as a way to address specifications for non-vinyl products. Since the baseline characteristics for the product are based on vinyl, it would be necessary for a manufacturer to test their non-vinyl product based on the vinyl specifications for each parameter listed. By providing those results, they would be able to differentiate the non-vinyl results and would be able to compare them to the minimum anticipated vinyl specifications. They would then be able to report how their wallcovering product compared to Type I, II, or III vinyl specifications. Because we have no results on any of these materials at this time, it cannot be determined how these materials would perform until that testing is completed. The non-vinyl manufacturer, using the W-102 standard, would be required to list their results and identify any exceptions where the product did not meet the performance requirement for Type I, II or III material. This would provide them the opportunity to compare their alternative material constructed product to the industry standard – vinyl.

The W-102 standard would be used for all non-vinyl materials based on the results provided by the manufacturer. Exceptions where the material does not meet the requirements for vinyl wallcovering would need to be specifically identified so that the purchasing entity would be fully aware of the differences between a vinyl specified wallcovering and an alternative non-vinyl wallcovering. This is meant as a mechanism for the purchaser to be fully aware of what type of product they were purchasing.

New 12-1-2018 Proposed change to NSF 342 Durability:

7.2.1 Durability

The manufacturer shall receive eight points for providing documentation showing that the product performs at or above all of the following industry-recognized standards, or equivalent. The standards that are relevant to the specific product:

Vinyl based products:
- ASTM F7935
- CCC-W-408D8
- W-101

Alternative materials constructed products:
- W 102

These test procedures can be performed in an internal or external laboratory that demonstrates a quality program with written test procedures including the performance of equipment calibration. The test results at the time of certification that show compliance will remain in place until there is a product or processing change that is significant enough to impact compliance to the standard’s requirements. Any needed modification/improvement on the method shall be performed as described and validated within the method. If alternate methods are used they shall be validated as equivalent or better in precision and accuracy than the specified method.

The current W 101 and the proposed W102 standard draft are provided with this submission.