Setting the record straight on plastic promises and fake facts

Taking on the challenge of timber lookalike PVC-u windows
It is now almost a generation since wood lost its prominence in the UK windows market to PVC-u, and 10 years since the Wood Window Alliance was formed to raise standards and fight back. Those years have seen a transformation in the timber window market, from low cost, site-glazed frames to fully factory-finished engineered timber windows.

This structural shift has been supported by the WWA’s strategy of establishing common standards; commissioning independent studies to support our durability, performance, sustainability and value arguments; and promoting wood windows as the quality choice for the more discerning homeowner.

We’ve had some success. In the years since the millennium, we have managed to increase prices while maintaining sales. We have almost doubled our installed-value share to 23% while unit share has held steady at around 14% (Palmer Report 2015).

Now there’s a new challenge: from what the PVC-u industry describes as a ‘new generation’ product – a PVC-u product that mimics the construction, detailing and finish of a timber window. These new windows are positioned between standard PVC-u and timber. They will earn higher margins and give PVC-u entry into the lucrative period homes sector.

It has been estimated that companies such as Residence 9 and Evolution are already selling £80-90m of these windows in the UK; and investment in new manufacturing capability is continuing.

We are simply not prepared to allow this market to go to PVC-u.

What’s our position?
We believe these fake wood windows are bad for the planet’s health, bad for people’s health and bad for their houses.

We have looked at the marketing claims made by the PVC-u companies in support of these timber lookalike windows and believe many are misleading. While continuing to make the positive case for wood windows, we are determined to do everything we can to expose these claims for what they are.

The Plastic Promises and Fake Facts campaign
That’s why we’ve launched this Plastic Promises and Fake Facts campaign.

Campaign arguments

1. Fake wood windows are bad for the planet’s health
PVC (a plastic) is a major user of fossil fuels – a non-renewable resource. According to the British Plastics Federation, plastics production uses 4% of global oil production annually. Chlorine, a major constituent of PVC, is energy and emissions-intensive. 8.06 million tonnes of chlorine – roughly a third of Europe’s total chlorine production – was used to manufacture PVC in Europe alone in 2013. The UK’s main chlorine plant in Runcorn has an overall energy consumption of over 250MW, roughly equivalent to the energy used by the city of Liverpool.
According to Waste Management World, in 2013 only some 15% of old PVC-u windows were recycled in the UK. But recycled PVC-u is a major pathway for hazardous legacy materials, such as mercury, cadmium and lead, into new PVC-u products.

2. Fake wood windows are bad for people’s health
PVC is made from Vinyl Chloride Monomer (VCM), a Class 1 human carcinogen. Many companies and organisations have placed PVC on a banned or precautionary list, including for example, the Cradle-to-Cradle Product Innovation Institute, the US Green Building Council, Perkins+Will architects, Google, Nike, Volvo and Apple.

3. Fake wood windows are bad for their property’s health
They won’t last as long as timber frames
They cannot be maintained, repaired or redecorated.

Campaign tools:
- **The Fake Facts** - clarification and our take on what the true facts are
- **A Letter from the Chairman** – this can be used to introduce the campaign to stakeholders, and it summarises what it is we are trying to achieve
- **A Clear Choice** – a briefing on the environmental performance of PVC-u vs wood windows, endorsed by the WWF
- **Video content** – a short video produced by the WWA that brings these facts to life and can be shared far and wide with all stakeholders
- **Infographic** – a piece of visual content that showcases the core plastic promises and can be used as part of stakeholder engagement and in social media
- **Press materials** – The WWA PR team will be engaging with trade and consumer media to ensure that they have the correct knowledge when it comes to PVC-u vs timber windows
- **Social media content** – a brief starting point to help members’ take the campaign to their social channels
- **Materials health** – a review of the materials health of PVC-u windows *uPVC windows through the life cycle* by The Alliance for Sustainable Building Products, February 2017
- **A Cradle to Cradle Feasibility Study** – on wooden window frames by SGS Search
- **Whole Life Analysis of timber, modified timber and aluminium-clad timber windows** – by Heriot Watt University, 2013

Campaign activation
- Through our PR agency, we will be contacting the press and key influencers with this pack.
- We will use social media
- We will work with allies in the timber industry.

But we also need you to use these arguments on your websites and in your sales material; to send it to each and every contact and influencer you know.