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Hertz Turns to Plant Oils to Squelch Stinky Cars

By [Tilde Herrera](#), July 28, 2009

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One of the most common complaints in the car rental industry is the smell of some vehicles, which can make you wonder what went on behind the wheel before you were handed the keys.

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The Hertz Corp. is tackling the dilemma with a biodegradable, non-toxic product that saps the stench from stinky rental cars without comprising air quality or aggravating allergies -- and so safe that the sales team of its maker, OMI Industries, will spray it into their own eyes to prove a point. Hertz is rolling out its odor-free fleet program with Fresh Wave IAQ, a product that will be used at 72 North American airport rental locations, 1,000 off-airport locations and 170 licensee locations in the U.S.

"We wanted to take a progressive approach toward odor neutralization by finding an innovative partner that provides a green technology to help us meet these demands, and Fresh Wave IAQ was clearly the best choice," Kent Seavey, Hertz's North American division vice president of operations support, said in a statement Monday.

Fresh Wave IAQ from OMI Industries is made up of water and plant oils, primarily lime, anise seed, cedar wood and clove. The plant oils are positively charged and attracted to negatively charged malodor molecules, explained Bob Dunklau, OMI's director of business development. The plant oil molecules absorb the malodor molecules and begin the process of breaking them down until the smell is gone, rather than masking it as most air fresheners do.

The smell of cigarette smoke is the top customer complaint, according to Hertz spokeswoman Paula Rivera, followed by heavy fragrances, and pet and trash odors.

Hertz expects the program will have a positive impact on its bottom line, Rivera said. "Economically, the technology OMI is providing us will enable us to keep our cars on the road longer," she said. "We'll have less downtime due to cleaning issues."

The product is also beneficial for customers with respiratory allergies and for vehicle service attendants who will now be protected from exposure to chemicals found in air fresheners, such as alcohol, Dunklau said.

Fresh Wave IAQ is OMI's commercial product, but the company also makes formulations for residential and industrial use, such as paper mills. All have undergone human and fish toxicity testing, emboldening its sales team to demonstrate its harmlessness by spraying Fresh Wave IAQ into their own eyes.

"That's our confidence in our product ... We're legends for it," Dunklau said.

The company didn't start off marketing its products as being green when it was founded in 1988, Dunklau said.

"It was for odor abatement," he said. "The fact that we're green, the world has sort of come to us."

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Fresh Wave IAQ is OMI's commercial odor abatement product.

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