

Take steps to avoid 'greenwashing' scam

With the growing number of consumers demanding environmentally friendly products, more and more companies are jumping on the "eco" bandwagon.

More than ever, consumers are showered with marketing campaigns for goods and services advertising products which claim to be friendly to the environment or "green."

According to TerraChoice, an environmental consulting agency, green advertising nearly tripled between 2006 and 2008.

Terms such as carbon-neutral, sustainable and biodegradable are used widely in the marketplace today. What do these claims mean, and are they really true?

Misleading consumers about the environmental practices of a company or the environmental benefits of a product or service is known as "greenwashing."

Such campaigns often mislead consumers through the use of false labels, unsubstantiated statements, vaguely defined claims, irrelevant



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claims, or claims that are downright false.

It occurs most often in advertising and labeling for common

household products such as household cleaners, baby goods and cosmetics.

The problem greenwashing presents is it diminishes trust in the marketplace, takes market share away from products offering legitimate benefits, and slows progress toward sustainability.

Fortunately, the Federal Trade Commission is expected to update its environmental marketing guidelines for the first time since 1998, bolstering the agency's ability to take action against greenwashing as unfair or deceptive advertising. Manufacturers and marketers of green goods and services can expect increased pressure to avoid greenwashing in the coming year.

As a consumer you can

take these simple steps to ensure you're purchasing a product that offers the environmental benefits it advertises:

- Continue to support greener products. Consumers have enormous power to shape the marketplace. Sustaining the movement speeds the spread of real environmental innovation.

- Learn about the seven sins of greenwashing at www.sinsofgreenwashing.org. The site is provided by TerraChoice and offers green-shopping tools for consumers.

- Beware of false labels. There are more than 350 eco-seals. Look for and choose products with credible eco-labels. Energy Star, EcoLogo, Green Guard, Green Seal, USDA Organic and WaterSense are considered trustwor-

thy. Also look for the Forest Stewardship Council (FSC), Design for the Environment (DfE), Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design (LEED) and U.S. Green Building Council (USGBC).

- In the absence of a reliable eco-label, remember the seven sins of greenwashing and choose a product that offers transparency, information and education.

For additional information concerning greenwashing and other household tips, visit www.bbbhouston.org or contact us at 713-868-9500.

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