

The London Free Press

Greenwash Our Woes Away

By By Ian Gillespie

December 1, 2009

For Wednesday's column, I tried to shed some light on an "Eco-Friendly" tag found on a shirt (made by a Montreal-based company called Point Zero) by a London man.

Along the way, I learned a lot about "greenwashing."

A spin on "whitewash," the word "greenwash" is widely believed to have been coined by American environmentalist Jay Westerveld in 1986.

In essence, it's defined as the misleading act of companies, industries, governments and individuals trying to promote unjustified environmentally friendly practices and services through branding, mislabeling, packaging or public relations.

Remi Trudel, an assistant professor at Boston University who specializes in ethical consumption, told me that, "Greenwashing is trying to promote yourself as being green or ethical, and not being so." One of the consequences of greenwashing, said Trudel, is that "this makes consumers question all other companies that are actually trying to do the right thing. It's made some consumers ultra-suspicious and skeptical."

I also spoke to Scott McDougall, who heads

a company called TerraChoice Environmental Marketing. He explained his "Seven Sins of Greenwashing."

To learn more, check out the TerraChoice web site. There are some informative press releases; to find them, click on NEWS, then MEDIA RELEASES.

In the end, said McDougall, it's in a company's interest to make honest and factual environmental claims.

"It makes for better marketing to engage the client in a relationship built on trust," he said. "It's better business to be as transparent as possible in these things."

In this regard, I think Point Zero's "eco-friendly" tag fails miserably.