

Consumers face wave of greenwash

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A SURVEY into green marketing in Australia has found almost all products carrying environmentally friendly claims are guilty of greenwashing.

TerraChoice, an environmental marketing firm, has released its *Seven Sins of Greenwashing* report, which scrutinises the environmental claims companies put on products to see if they are misleading.

It shows that more companies are using environmental claims but that 98 per cent have committed at least one of the seven sins, a similar statistic to the North American and British markets. In Australia, 1937 "green" claims were recorded on 866 products.

TerraChoice chief executive Scott McDougall — in Sydney and Melbourne this week to speak at the Green Marketing Forum — said unsubstantiated claims of water savings were rife in Australia.

Almost 14 per cent of the Australian products surveyed promised some degree of water savings, compared with 0.4 per cent of products in Britain and 1.6 per cent in the US.

Most were guilty of the "sin of no proof", or making claims unsupported by third-party verification. Claims related to air quality and energy were also prevalent.

"The good news is that the growing availability of green products shows that consumers are demanding more environmentally responsible choices, and that marketers and manufacturers are listening," Mr McDougall said.

"The bad news is that the survey ... shows that almost all committed at least one sin of greenwashing and that some marketers are exploiting consumers' demand for third-party certification by creating fake labels or false suggestions of third-party endorsement."

The report focused on products TerraChoice says are particularly susceptible to greenwashing, such as toys, baby products, cosmetics and cleaning products.

Products providing legitimate eco-labelling were nearly twice as common as in 2007. More than 23 per cent of those claiming "green" status had used proper logos rather than unfamiliar ones, compared with 13.7 per cent in 2007.

Other greenwashing "sins" include vagueness (a product may be "all natural", but arsenic and mercury occur naturally); irrelevance (an aerosol may claim to be CFC-free, but CFCs are no longer used in aerosols); and worshipping false labels (for example, a frog or rainforest on a label to suggest the product has green certification).

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