

# Lead by Example Case Study:

## *Avoid Being Greenwashed!*

To truly ensure that you or your agency is purchasing environmentally preferable products and services, you will need to do a little homework. Luckily, several third party certification agencies have sprouted up to take the stress out of making sure you purchase environmentally preferable products and services.

As you would assume, not all companies and products are created equal. With the "going green" talk and media buzz all around us these days, some companies are trying to cash in on an increased consumer demand to be more green through purchasing green or environmentally preferable products.

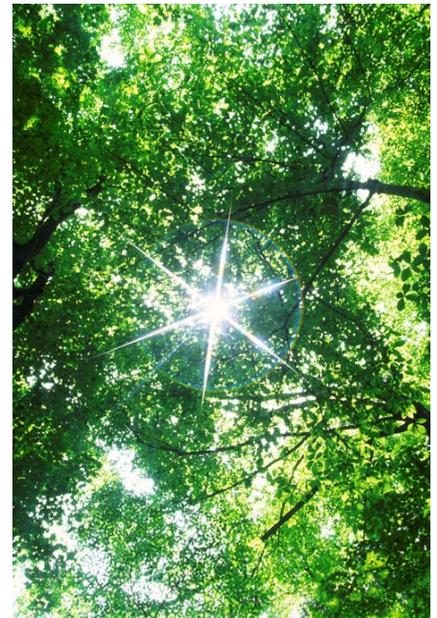
The information below will hopefully help clear up some of the misconceptions of what "green" really is.

## *What is Greenwashing?*

### Green-wash

(grēn 'wōsh' , -wōsh' ) - verb

The act of misleading consumers regarding the environmental practices of a company or the environmental benefits of a product or service.



*It's easy to buy green when you know what to look out for. Use eco-labels to make buying green easier!*

## *Six Guidelines of Greenwashing*

Researchers from TerraChoice Environmental Marketing, which manages the EcoLogo Program, identified "sins" that companies perform to lure you to buy their product.

**The Hidden Trade-Off:** Focusing on one or two environmental facts, but ignoring other significantly more important environmental concerns. e.g. Lead-free wheel weights made from zinc poses aquatic toxicity issues. *(Use coated steel weights)*

**No Proof/Unsubstantiated Claims:** Some manufacturers are unable to give proof of their environmental claims.

**Vagueness:** Broad, poorly defined environmental claims. e.g. Products claiming "100% all natural", "Degradable" and other claims that aren't regulated terms.

**Irrelevance:** Factually correct, but irrelevant environmental assessments. e.g. Products claiming to be CFC-free when through CFC's have long been banned.

**Fibbing:** Misleading consumers about the actual environmental performance of their products. e.g. Making false claims about certification.

**Lesser of Two Evils:** A product can be the most environmental friendly in its class, but still be an environmentally unwise purchase/choice to make. e.g. Organic cigarettes

**Greenwashing Guidelines from TerraChoice's** (Six Sins of [Greenwashing Report](#))



*Hennepin County inserted EPA's Design for the Environment (DfE), EcoLogo and Green Seal certifications into their janitorial contracts to make cleaning green easy!*

- Continues on back-



## Misleading Claims

Beware of possibly misleading claims that are on product labels, brochures, commercials, websites, promotional items, and more. The claims below are unregulated words or phrases.

Eco-safe

Environmentally friendly

Earth friendly

Earth smart

Environmentally safe

Environmentally preferable

Essentially non-toxic

Practically non-toxic

Made with non-toxic ingredients

Degradable

Biodegradable

Compostable

CFC-free

Ozone friendly

Recyclable

And others!

**False Claims!**  
According to the \*FTC

\*Federal Trade Commission

## What Can You Do?

There are several approaches you can do to support companies that value your interest in purchasing green. Some rely on their gut instincts. Fortunately, there are several widely accepted environmental standards and certifications that make it easier to purchase green.

### Support Standards *(see TerraChoice for more details)*

#### Multi-Attribute Certification Organizations

*(These look at the entire lifecycle of a product with several having a third party certification process)*

**Green Seal** (certifies several product types and services) [www.greenseal.org](http://www.greenseal.org)

**EcoLogo** (certified several products types) [www.ecologo.org/en/](http://www.ecologo.org/en/)

**Chlorine Free Products Association** (certifies paper and tissue products) [www.chlorinefreeproducts.org](http://www.chlorinefreeproducts.org)

#### Single-Attribute Certification Organizations

*(These examine a single environmental attribute such as the amount of VOC's emitted by a product)*

**Forest Stewardship Council** (certifies that wood was harvested in a sustainable way) [www.fscus.org](http://www.fscus.org)

**Green-e** (certifies sources of renewable electricity and products that are generated from cleaner energy source) [www.green-e.org](http://www.green-e.org)

**Green Guard** (certifies products based on indoor air quality issues) [www.greenguard.org](http://www.greenguard.org)

#### Additional Environmental Standards

*(They allow manufacturers to declare their products meet a publicly available standard)*

**Energy Star Program** (lists products meeting the Federal governments efficiency requirements) [www.energystar.gov](http://www.energystar.gov)

**DfE** (Environmental Protection Agencies' Design of the Environment) [www.epa.gov/df/](http://www.epa.gov/df/)

**EPEAT** (ranks computer desktops, laptops, and monitors into EPEAT Bronze, Silver, or Gold categories based on various environmental criteria) [www.epeat.net](http://www.epeat.net)

## Other Online Resources

**Consumer Reports Greener Choices** (Products for a Better Planet) [www.greenerchoices.org/home.cfm](http://www.greenerchoices.org/home.cfm)

*For more information on Hennepin County's Environmentally Preferable Purchasing Program or the Lead by Example Incentive Fund, please contact:  
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**Hennepin County  
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[www.hennepin.us](http://www.hennepin.us) 8/08

*The Electronic Products Environmental Assessment Tool (EPEAT) is a helpful certification to procure desktop computers, notebooks, and monitors based on their environmental attributes.*

