

Expert says greenwashing widespread



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A US expert in 'greenwashing' says most companies that engage in the practice of falsely spruiking their green credentials don't do it to deceive customers, but because they are not yet good enough at green advertising.

Scott McDougall, chief executive of North American environmental marketing agency Terrechoice, is in Australia to address two green marketing forums about his company's 2008-09 study on companies selling green products in Australia, the United States, Canada and the United Kingdom.

The study found that over 98% committed at least one Terrechoice's seven sins of greenwashing, which include unsubstantiated claims, vaguely defined claims, misleading third party endorsements and false claims.

McDougall says what makes something green is determined by science and is not subjective. "Our tests were drawn up on very high standards," McDougall says.

Despite these findings McDougall says companies guilty of committing one of the green sins should not be punished and argues the high percentage of companies that have committed greenwashing sins didn't do so to deceive customers.

"It was not an attempt to mislead consumers," he says. "They're just not that good at it yet. Companies are still trying to figure out what green means to them.

"There is no perfectly green company today."

McDougall says the best way to fight greenwashing is with information and argues that consumers "should look for and support products offering more information".

But he also says consumers should continue supporting green products even if they are greenwashing because "some green is better than no green".

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