



Products In US, Canada Mislead On 'Green' Labeling

October 26, 2010

More than 95 percent of consumer products examined in the U.S. and Canada committed at least one offense of "greenwashing," a term used to describe unproven environmental claims, according to a report published Tuesday by TerraChoice, a North American environmental marketing company.

While unsubstantiated claims of "green" attributes declined slightly in recent years, the problem was still widely prevalent, as more manufacturers flooded the market with items deemed to be better for the environment. Of particular concern were items proclaiming to be free of controversial chemicals Bisphenol A (BPA) and phthalates - especially baby and toy products, according to the report.

The study examined more than 5,000 consumer products in 34 stores in the U.S. and Canada and found 12,061 "green" claims among them. Among the infractions found were fibbing about or having no proof of environmental claims, vague or poorly-defined marketing language such as "all-natural" and the use of fake labels designed to imply a product has third-party certification or endorsement of its claims.

"The scary thing is that manufacturers are not providing independent proof of these claims," said Scot Case, a market

development director for Underwriters Laboratories. "The same verification we expect from accounting records, we should expect from BPA claims."

TerraChoice was recently acquired by Underwriters Laboratories, an independent product-safety certification organization. Both TerraChoice and Underwriters Laboratories offer green certification programs and could benefit if more manufacturers sought third-party verification of the eco-claims.

While the overall incidence of greenwashing dipped slightly - 4.5 percent of products were dubbed "sin free," versus only one percent in the first study in 2007 - particular concerns were raised about the huge surge over the past year of products claiming to be free of BPA, a compound used in plastics such as baby bottles, and phthalates, which are used to give plastics like pacifiers flexibility and durability.

Concerns were raised about BPA's possible health effects, including the impact on fetal and infant brains, and earlier this month, the Canadian government added BPA to its toxic substances list. Other health concerns were raised about phthalates. The report said not a single "green" toy was free of greenwashing, and less than one percent of baby products were "sin free."

Lists key features of the appliance you're looking at and the similar models that make up the cost range below.

U.S. Government Federal law prohibits removal of this label before consumer purchase.

ENERGYGUIDE

Refrigerator-Freezer
 • Automatic Defrost
 • Side-Mounted Freezer
 • Through-the-Door Ice

XYZ Corporation
 Model ABC-L
 Capacity: 23 Cubic Feet

Estimated Yearly Operating Cost

\$67


\$57 ————— \$74

Cost Range of Similar Models

630 kWh
 Estimated Yearly Electricity Use

Your cost will depend on your utility rates and use.

- Cost range based only on models of similar capacity with automatic defrost, side-mounted freezer, and through-the-door ice.
- Estimated operating cost based on a 2007 national average electricity cost of 10.65 cents per kWh.
- For more information, visit www.ftc.gov/appliances.



The maker, model, and size tell you exactly what product this label describes.

What you might pay to run the appliance for a year, based on its electricity use and the national average cost of energy. The cost appears on labels for all models and brands, so you can compare energy use just like you would price or other features.

The cost range helps you compare the energy use of different models by showing you the range of operating costs for models with similar features.

An estimate of how much electricity the appliance uses in a year based on typical use. Multiply this by your local electricity rate on your utility bill to better judge what your actual operating cost might be.

If you see the ENERGY STAR logo, it means the product is better for the environment because it uses less energy than standard models.