



Test Your Knowledge of the Seven Sins of Greenwashing with Name that Sin!

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Doesn't it seem like everyone is going green these days? But are they really? Unfortunately, many products are not as environmentally friendly as we are lead to believe.

Companies worldwide are engaging in greenwashing. If you are not familiar with the term, it's the act of misleading consumers regarding the environmental practices of a company or the environmental benefits of a product or service.

A 2009 report conducted by TerraChoice revealed that 98 per cent of products surveyed were guilty of greenwashing. Kids' toys, baby products, cosmetics and cleaning products were most often culprits.

What are the Seven Sins of Greenwashing?

1. Sin of the Hidden Trade-off

A claim suggesting that a product is 'green' based on a narrow set of attributes without attention to other important environmental issues. Paper, for example, is not necessarily environmentally-preferable just because it comes from a sustainably-harvested forest.

2. Sin of No Proof

An environmental claim that cannot be substantiated by easily accessible supporting information or by a reliable third-party certification. Common examples are facial tissues or toilet tissue products that claim various percentages of post-consumer recycled content without providing evidence.

3. Sin of Vagueness

A claim that is so poorly defined or broad that its real meaning is likely to be misunderstood by the consumer. 'All-natural' is an example. Arsenic, uranium, mercury, and formaldehyde are all naturally occurring, and poisonous. 'All natural' isn't necessarily 'green'.

4. Sin of Worshiping False Labels

A product that, through either words or images, gives the impression of third-party endorsement where no such endorsement exists; fake labels, in other words.

5. Sin of Irrelevance

An environmental claim that may be truthful but is unimportant or unhelpful for consumers

seeking environmentally preferable products. 'CFC-free' is a common example, since it is a frequent claim despite the fact that CFCs are banned by law.

6. Sin of Lesser of Two Evils

A claim that may be true within the product category, but that risks distracting the consumer from the greater environmental impacts of the category as a whole. Organic cigarettes could be an example of this Sin, as might the fuel-efficient sport-utility vehicle.

7. Sin of Fibbing

Environmental claims that are simply false. The most common examples were products falsely claiming to be Energy Star certified or registered.

What Can You Do?

Consumers do have the power to make an impact, so don't lose hope in all green products. Look for products with proper eco-labels, remember the seven sins of greenwashing, and consult other resources if you're not sure. Visit www.sinsofgreenwashing.org and www.ecologo.org for more information to help you avoid greenwashing.

TerraChoice has also launched an online game called Name that Sin. The game is a custom-built Flash application that challenges players with a variety of multiple choice questions. You can play the game more than once, as new questions are added each time. It's an interactive way to learn how to avoid greenwashing.