

"Greenwashing" rampant in US, says expert

Top marketing expert accuses authorities of failing to properly police green advertising claims

Danny Bradbury, [BusinessGreen](#), 24 Jun 2009

"Greenwashing" is rampant in the United States and federal agencies are ineffective at stopping it, one of the industry's leading experts warned a congressional hearing earlier this month.

Scot Case, vice president at environmental marketing firm [TerraChoice](#) and executive director for the [EcoLogo](#) environmental certification programme, said that a lack of joined-up thinking in government has led to confusion over which products are truly environmentally friendly, and which certifications should be used to evaluate them.

Speaking at a [hearing](#) of the House Of Representatives Subcommittee on Commerce, Trade and Consumer Protection, Case argued that the [Federal Trade Commission](#) (FTC) has failed to clearly define the term "green".

"FTC lacks the relevant environmental expertise to address the most fundamental question – how does one identify an environmentally preferable product?" [he said](#). "This question is instead being addressed by a variety of departments within EPA, sometimes with inconsistent approaches that are too narrowly focused on single environmental issues. One part of EPA focuses on energy-efficient products. Another focuses on less hazardous products. Another looks at water-efficient products."

Case said this "silo-based approach" opened the door to a torrent of misleading environmental product claims, noting that 98 per cent of products surveyed by TerraChoice for a recent report entitled [The Seven Sins of Greenwashing](#) were guilty of some degree of "greenwashing".

A lack of policing also allows firms to make exaggerated environmental claims with little fear of repercussions, Case warned.

He accused the EPA of not always requiring manufacturers to prove they are compliant before letting them use the high-profile Energy Star logo, citing an experience where he bought a fridge labelled with the logo, only to find it used twice as much energy as claimed.

Case called for a single environmental certification programme to replace the multiple programmes currently in operation.

[Testimony](#) at the same hearing by James Kohm, director of the enforcement division at the Federal Trade Commission, focused on the environmental marketing monitoring programmes that the Commission had implemented. It is planning a study, to be completed by the end of this year, that will focus on consumer understanding of green marketing claims.