

# MARKETING

## Most eco-friendly consumer products guilty of greenwashing: TerraChoice study

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A new study released this week by environmental marketing company TerraChoice says that more than 95% of consumer products claiming to be green commit at least one sin of greenwashing.

The report, called *The Sins of Greenwashing: Home and Family Edition*, highlighted (you guessed it) seven deadly greenwashing sins—described as "the act of misleading consumers about the environmental practices of a company or the environmental benefits of a product or service." They include "Hidden trade-off," where the green claim is achieved with an unreasonably narrow set of attributes; "No proof," where claims are made that cannot be substantiated; and "vagueness," when a green claim is so broad or poorly defined that its true meaning is easily misunderstood by consumers.

"No Proof" was the most persistent of all the sins in 2010, with the majority of tested products falling into this category. It's a sin that's been on the rise since 2007 when the study was launched.

But it's not all bad news. The study reported that the percentage of products completely void of greenwashing has increased to 4.5% this year from 2% in 2009.

That increase comes as the number of "greener" products on the market was up 73% over 2009.

TerraChoice also found the proportion of "sin-free" products is five times greater in "mature" categories such as building, construction and office products than in "immature" categories such as toys and baby products. In the latter category, 100% of toys and 99.2% of baby products surveyed were guilty of some form of greenwashing.

The study also found that big box retailers stock more products that provide legitimate environmental certifications than smaller "green" boutique-style stores.

This year, TerraChoice examined 5,296 products making environmental claims, and the company visited 19 retail stores in Canada and 15 in the United States.