

Eco friend or foe—can you tell the difference?

By Kimberly Janeway

November 1, 2010

Buying green products can make you feel like you're doing your part to save the environment. And all those claims about "earth friendly" and "all natural" make spending more for these items seem sensible, even laudable.



But here's an eye-opener: Over 95 percent of "greener" products found on store shelves were guilty of greenwashing, according to [TerraChoice](#), an environmental marketing agency and part of [Underwriters Laboratories](#). TerraChoice looked at nearly 5,300 products found in stores in the U.S. and Canada last spring. Their report, "[The Sins of Greenwashing](#)," exposes seven sins to watch for:

- **Sin of the hidden trade-off.** The package says the computer paper comes from a sustainably-harvested forest, but doesn't tell you about other key environmental issues, such

as the energy used and the pollution that results from producing the paper.

- **Sin of no proof.** The tissue box claims the paper is made of 80 percent post-consumer recycled content, but there's no certification from a recognized group or an easy way to find out.
- **Sin of vagueness.** The product is promoted as all-natural, but mercury and arsenic are also naturally occurring.
- **Sin of irrelevance.** The claim may be true, but who cares? A product claims it doesn't contain chlorofluorocarbons, but CFCs are prohibited by law.
- **Sin of lesser of two evils.** The claim may be true, but it distracts you from the bigger picture. For example, fuel-efficient SUVs.
- **Sin of fibbing.** Fortunately, it's the least common sin, but lies are told, like falsely claiming an appliance is [Energy Star certified](#).
- **Sin of worshipping false labels.** These give you the false impression that a third party certified the product.

Find out which labels and claims you can trust by visiting the Greener Choices [Eco-labels center](#).