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# Misleading Claims On 'Green' Labeling

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Confused by all the "green" claims of products on store shelves out there? There's good reason to be.

According to a study due out Tuesday, more than 95% of consumer products examined committed at least one offense of "greenwashing," a term used to describe unproven environmental claims, according to TerraChoice, a North American environmental-marketing company that issued the report.

While unsubstantiated claims of "green" attributes have declined slightly in recent years, the problem is still widely prevalent as more manufacturers flood the market with items deemed to be better for the environment. Of particular concern: items proclaiming to be free of controversial chemicals 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: 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.

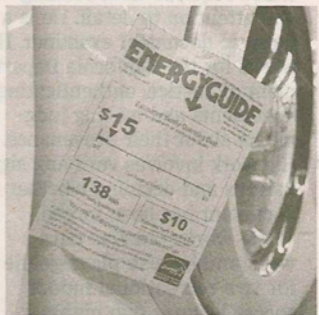
"The scary thing is that manufacturers are not providing independent proof of these claims," says Scot Case, a market-development director for Underwriters Laboratories Inc. "The same verification we expect from accounting records, we should expect from BPA claims." TerraChoice was recently acquired by Underwriters Laboratories, an independent product-safety certification organization. Both TerraChoice and Underwriters Laboratories offer green-certification programs and could benefit if more manufacturers seek third-party verification of the eco-claims.

While the overall incidence of greenwashing dipped slightly—4.5% of products were dubbed "sin free" versus only 1% in 2007 when the first study was conducted—particular concerns were raised about the huge

surge over the past year of products claiming to be free of Bisphenol A, a compound used in plastics such as baby bottles and other consumer products, and phthalates, which are used to give plastics like pacifiers flexibility and durability.

Concerns have been raised about BPA's possible health effects, including the impact on fetal and infant brains. Earlier this month, the Canadian government added BPA to its toxic-substances list. Other health concerns have been raised about phthalates. The report says not a single "green" toy was free of greenwashing, and that less than 1% of baby products were "sin free."

Separately, the report found that the most common examples



Claims of Energy Star compliance were most commonly misstated.

of outright fibbing came from products falsely claiming to be compliant with the federal government's Energy Star program. The government is tightening its monitoring of such claims.

The findings come as the U.S. Federal Trade Commission, which can take action against unfair or deceptive marketing practices, has proposed tightening its guidelines to help marketers avoid making misleading environmental claims. Among the proposals: cautioning marketers not to use "unqualified certifications or seals of approval" regarding their claims, and not to make blanket, general assertions that a product is "environmentally friendly" or "eco-friendly" because such claims are nearly impossible to substantiate.

A proposal for a federal program has also been floated by the office of Sen. Dianne Feinstein (D-Calif.) that would recognize consumer products that are environmentally preferable.