

## **Certiably green**

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### **Green Market Trends**

Do your research before you start applying to one of these environmental business certification programs.

*by: Kate Carr, Editor in Chief*

**Accountability:** It's one of the most important components of your green marketing campaign. In other words, you need to be able to explain and prove to your customers that the environmental claims you make about your carwash services are true.

It's not just the right thing to do; it's also the legal standard of the Federal Trade Commission. As Steve Ashkin, president of The Ashkin Group, a leading advocacy organization promoting green cleaning in the professional cleaning industry, explained, the FTC, in their general truth of advertising policy, requires companies to substantiate any claims they make in marketing a product or service.

### **Verifying your standards**

The "truth in advertising" policy is not only important to your customers, but also to you, as a consumer of carwash equipment and chemicals. If a soap manufacturer claims a product is biodegradable or phosphate-free, the manufacturer must be able to provide proof that they can substantiate their claim.

"Verification is the same thing as testing," Ashkin explained. "But that verification can be done by the company itself or it can be done by a third party." Enter: The certification program.

Nowadays there are several options for manufacturers who seek an independent third party certification. But why would a company want to jump through all those hoops? According to Ashkin, a third-party program guarantees another element of authenticity.

"As our marketplace becomes more informed about these issues more and more people will know how to distinguish between a manufacturer's self-certification and an independent third-party certification," Ashkin stated. Not only that, but the FTC is currently revising their guidelines for environmental claims, so the sooner you jump on the bandwagon, the better.

### **The third parties**

There are three major certifiers in the U.S. market, according to Ashkin:

- Green Seal,
- Terrachoice (also known as Eco Logo); and
- The Environmental Protection Agency's Design for the Environment.

It's not necessary that you choose a manufacturer who has been certified by one of these programs, but it does make marketing sense. As Ashkin explained, "these days purchasers are becoming attuned to the fact that it's best if the claims have been checked by an independent third party."

### **Your wash operation**

Although these programs mostly apply to chemical products, the smart wash operator will make sure his entire operation is eco-friendly when considering his purchase and marketing program. After all, your customers will expect more than just a green soap when you tell them your wash is green.

"These days the big environmental issues are really focused on climate change and energy," Ashkin stated, continuing on to point out the special attention given to water conservation today.

"In some respects, worrying about the detergents is really a distraction of what the real issue is," Ashkin said. "The big issue really is water use."

To that end, Ashkin suggested operators be water smart and use a water reclaim and other conservation equipment, as well as market these features to their customer base. For members of the International Carwash Association, an educational marketing program has already been created. Check out [www.icawatersavers.org](http://www.icawatersavers.org) to learn more.

"Your customers need to be informed," he explained. "Consumers themselves are being exposed to this in so many other areas that they're becoming reasonably informed; especially those who care."