

# Is It Green or

By Mike Sawchuk

*More than three decades ago, several manufacturers were introducing an array of products they termed “environmentally safe,” “recyclable,” “earth-friendly,” “natural,” “biodegradable,” and “ecological.” Most of these terms were new to the lexicon and their meanings were unclear. Therefore, even though notoriously poisonous chemicals such as arsenic can be called “natural,” consumers were led to believe these expressions meant the products were safer and less harmful to users, building occupants, visitors and the environment.*

Years later, some of these products were found to be considerably less “people-safe” or environmentally friendly than portrayed. In some cases, this was not because of deception intended to take advantage of a new marketing trend, but the result of the best knowledge of the day, which turned out to be faulty. However, there were also many cases where products were simply “self-declared” more protective of the environment by their manufacturer, with little fact to back up the claim. The result was a lot of confusion that many experts believe actually stymied the green evolution.

Jump ahead 30 years, and many consumers today believe this confusion and misrepresentation is long gone. If a product says it is green or environmentally friendly, it is.

According to a recently released study by TerraChoice Environmental Marketing, of the 1,018 consumer products making a total of 1,753 health, safety and environmental claims, all but one product made false





# Greenwashed?

statements “that risk misleading intended [consumer] audiences,” said the report.

The report, “The Six Sins of Greenwashing,” identified six of these false or misleading claims as:

**1. Sin of the Hidden Trade-Off:**

This occurs when the manufacturer terms a product “green” based on only a single attribute, such as the fact that the product is made from recycled content, even though it contains other ingredients that may be harmful to people and the environment.

**2. Sin of No Proof:** Several products make human health and environmental protective claims, but do not substantiate them with supporting evidence, certification or any independent, third-party verification.

**3. Sin of Vagueness:** Many products make claims that are so vague or poorly defined that they have no meaning, such as calling a product “chemical free”; no product is totally free of chemicals.