



Media Contact:
Mary Peters
Marketing and Communications Manager
301.891.3683
mary@newdream.org

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by Janice Lieberman

Okay, we get it. We all want our environment to be cleaner and greener for us and for our children. The message is clear: buy "green" products. Do your part. But with merchandise from shampoos to cars, how do you know what you're buying is truly good for the planet?

It's hard not to be bombarded with marketing campaigns, which tout their company to be the greenest of the land. But who is watching over these companies to make sure what they're saying is honest?

Well, it's a whole new frontier, folks. There's even a name for being bamboozled into believing ad copy that says a product is environmentally friendly. It's called "Greenwashing." And now Uncle Sam has to take notice.

The Federal Trade Commission which oversees ads and makes sure claims are truthful called for a special meeting. It was a seminar to update their environmental advertising guidelines, which, by the way, haven't been updated in 10 years!

When I asked the FTC to explain to me how I could tell if a product is truly green, the answers were vague. That's because companies can presently use catchy words like "certified organic," "energy efficient" or "100% natural" without much justification.

While the FTC works on these new standards (which will take some time) what is a shopper to do? The only thing we really can do is to research the product and the company ourselves. That means reading up on the company's philosophy and being critical of what they call "green."

It means **being wary of claims like "natural," "organic," "non toxic," "recyclable."** No one is checking to see if these claims are for real. It would be great one day to have a government seal like "energy star" found on appliances that you know has been documented and verified. But for now it's basically the Wild, Wild West when it comes to this new blitz.

Check out the company's website. Read all about why they claim to be environmentally friendly. If the information is not there, move on. Read the small print on the packaging and see if they explain how and why they are green. Call the customer service number and grill the operator about why their claims are true.

Don't buy into big promises. If a detergent says it is “chemical free” what are they using to clean your clothes? If something is “biodegradable”, how so? Is it going to end up in a landfill?

Certifications you can trust:

- Energy Star for appliances and electronics
- USDA seal for organic products
- Green Seal and EcoLogo for household cleaning products
- Forest Stewardship Council for wood and paper products

Here's some help on doing your own research. Websites that can help you through this maze of claims:

- Greenerchoices.org (big purchases: TV's, washing machines, cars)
- Greencars.org
- Epeat.net (can help decipher manufacturer's claims)
- Ewg.org (Environmental working group)
- Responsiblepurchasing.org (for smaller items like cosmetics, cleaners and food)

We all want a greener world, we just don't want to waste our greenbacks on products that sound too good to be true, but really aren't. Agree?