

exercise

# 3

## 7 sins of greenwashing



### Deadline

TBA

<sup>1</sup> Exercise based on TerraChoice Greenwashing Report, Ottawa 2009 and 2010.

More information about greenwashing:  
<http://sinsofgreenwashing.org/>

According to 2010 Greenwashing Report (<http://sinsofgreenwashing.org/index35c6.pdf>) in Canada and USA there were 4744 products reported in the market, making green claims and delivering green speeches, with over 95% of the retailers committing at least one of the “Seven Sins of Greenwashing”.<sup>1</sup>

The sins of greenwashing were introduced in 2007 by TerraChoice, a marketing firm located in Ottawa, and consist in a list of “irregularities” that “green” products present when they are not exactly what they say they are. Any coincidence with Exercise 2 hypothetical VCD? Yes, same idea.

TerraChoice tested all claims against best practices, including guidelines provided by US, Canada governments and the ISO standard for environmental labelling.

In this exercise you have to work in teams of three students, identify and bring 3 examples of “green products” committing one or several “greenwashing sins”, report and present to the class. For more statistic details in Canada see the last page.

The list of sins:

### 1 Sin of the Hidden Trade-off

A claim suggesting that a product is ‘green’ based on a narrow set of attributes without attention to other important environmental issues. Paper, for example, is not necessarily environmentally-preferable just because it comes from a sustainably-harvested forest. Other important environmental issues in the paper-making process, such as greenhouse gas emissions, or chlorine use in bleaching may be equally important.

### 2 Sin of No Proof

An environmental claim that cannot be substantiated by easily accessible supporting information or by a reliable third-party certification. Common examples are facial tissues or toilet tissue products that claim various percentages of post-consumer recycled content without providing evidence.

- 3 Sin of Vagueness**  
A claim that is so poorly defined or broad that its real meaning is likely to be misunderstood by the consumer. 'All-natural' is an example. Arsenic, uranium, mercury, and formaldehyde are all naturally occurring, and poisonous. 'All natural' isn't necessarily 'green'.
- 4 Sin of Worshiping False Labels**  
A product that, through either words or images, gives the impression of third-party endorsement where no such endorsement exists; fake labels, in other words.
- 5 Sin of Irrelevance**  
An environmental claim that may be truthful but is unimportant or unhelpful for consumers seeking environmentally preferable products. 'CFC-free' is a common example, since it is a frequent claim despite the fact that CFCs are banned by law.
- 6 Sin of Lesser of Two Evils**  
A claim that may be true within the product category, but that risks distracting the consumer from the greater environmental impacts of the category as a whole. Organic cigarettes could be an example of this Sin, as might the fuel-efficient sport-utility vehicle.
- 7 Sin of Fibbing**  
Environmental claims that are simply false. The most common examples were products falsely claiming to be Energy Star certified or registered.