

# Are your green products really green?

By [John Coetzee](#)

29 Nov 2012

The cleaning product you've just purchased is "green", at least, that's what the manufacturer claims. The truth is, however, that if you were to scrutinise the ingredients, you would probably find it's not green at all. In fact, it's far from it.

Companies worldwide have jumped on the green bandwagon and through marketing have aligned their products with the green sphere, even though their products do not actually live up to the promise of being green. So what makes a product green? First, one needs to understand the real definition of what green is.

Every product produced in the world today leaves a mark on the environment. This is known as its ecological footprint. A product's ecological footprint starts with its design and continues through to its disposal, and is measured as being harmful or eco-friendly. Green is the philosophy and lifestyle of conducting normal business operations, while using products and processes that don't harm the environment or our planet.

## Being green has become a way of life

While green operations were once a way of promoting one's business, today being green has become a way of life for many businesses. Green, you could say, is the new black. A number of businesses have adopted green policies, from recycling office paper to switching off appliances when not in use, to using green cleaning products. This has come about for several reasons. Among the top reasons are the need to conserve energy and become energy independent, and the advance in technology, which makes being environmentally conscientious not only a good business philosophy, but also a cost-effective solution.

While more and more businesses have cottoned on to the benefits of going green, so too are more companies offering green solutions and products. Green cleaning solutions are particularly popular. Companies know that there are numerous benefits associated with green cleaning products. Not only do they improve indoor air quality, in turn improving employee productivity and satisfaction, but they also reduced negative environmental impact, save company owners money, optimise life-cycle performance of building materials and contribute to the health and well-being of the community.

## False claims

However, the problem is that a number of commercial cleaning suppliers claim to be something they're not. They're committing, what is termed, the Seven Sins of Green Washing: listing ingredients that are "eco-friendly", but don't disclose those that are hazardous (sin of the hidden trade-off), they claim to be "certified organic", but hold no verifiable certification (sin of no proof), they claim to be 100% natural when many naturally occurring substances are hazardous -such as arsenic and formaldehyde (sin of vagueness), they claim to be CFC-free, even though CFCs were banned 20 years ago (sin of irrelevance) they claim to be certified by an internationally recognised environmental standard (sin of fibbing) and through wither words or images they give the impression of third-party endorsement when no such endorsement actually exists - fake labels, fake graphs, fake comparisons and fake tests (sin of worshipping false labels).

A classic example might be a chemical company that runs an advertising campaign touting a "green" technology they're working on, but that green technology represents only a sliver of the company's otherwise not-so-green business, or may be marketed on the heels of an oil spill or plant explosion. Another example is that of a hotel chain that calls itself green because it allows guests to choose to sleep on the same sheets and reuse towels, but actually does very little to save water and energy where it counts. Or a bank that's suddenly green because you can conduct your finances online, or a grocery store that's green because they'll take back your plastic grocery bags, and so on.

## Separate the truth from the lies

With so many companies selling so many sins, it's difficult to separate the truth from the lies. No one specific board that monitors products claiming to be green exists in South Africa and, as consumers, it is almost impossible to tell the difference between non-green and real green products just by glancing at the packaging. This is why it is imperative actually to examine the label, ask for the MSDS sheet and ask for the product's safety ratings. Alternatively, consumers can simply Google the company name, plus the word "environment" and see what pops up. This is far from scientific, but if consumers or environmental advocates have taken issue with the company's track record, something's bound to materialise.

Nobody likes to be taken advantage of, especially when it comes to money. So, the next time you buy a cleaning product claiming to be green, ask yourself: Are the manufacturers of this product telling the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth? - before you buy it. The last thing you want to do is spend money on a product or service you believe is doing right by the environment, but in reality is not. For this reason, there are certification processes that exist for green cleaning services. Insist that your cleaning contractor provides evidence.

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

John Coetzee is the CEO of Managed Care Economical Solutions (MCES).

For more, visit: <https://www.bizcommunity.com>