

NATURAL COSMETIC NEWS

Misleading "Natural" Claims

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More than 98% of supposedly "natural" products in the US are making potentially false or misleading claims, according to a study performed by TerraChoice, an environmental consulting firm.

The study of nearly 4,000 consumer products discovered unverifiable information and blatant lies regarding their claim to be 100% natural, all natural, organic, or otherwise environmental friendly.

The rise of the 'green' craze has not only driven manufacturers and brands to search for creative marketing strategies to appeal to the new green conscious consumer, but also the 300+ environmental certification programmes are competing for a piece of the market. Shoppers are now bombarded by irrelevant and deceptive labels, claiming to be something they are not.

Green, natural, eco-friendly, recyclable, fragrance free, we have now seen and heard it all, but are they true? Sadly, as the study shows, 98% are false.

You may wonder how this can be true; and think to yourself: don't I, as a consumer, have the right to be protected against such lies and deception? Well, trust me, you are not the only one posing this question. But unfortunately government agencies that regulate drugs, food, and personal care products, like the FDA, do not define or regulate the use of the word "natural" on personal care or cosmetic products.

Within the government agencies regulating the labeling and advertising of cosmetics there is a lack of consensus on what the term "natural" actually means. This has led to there being very little guidance on the use of "natural" on labels and in advertising.

The majority of consumers believe that "natural" products come from nature, which gives consumers a false sense of security about their safety. In some consumers minds "natural" is synonymous with safe, but be warned not all things natural are safe.

Manufacturers and marketers alike are capitalizing on the unregulated terms that carry significant "green" appeal, like "natural", "non-toxic", and "fragrance free", and by doing so are gravely misleading consumers, and in some cases just flat out lying.

This is not to say that all products with "natural" labels are not "natural", but more likely than not the products claiming to be all "natural" include more than just natural ingredients.

Reading the fine print on labels will not necessarily help either. Companies are not required to disclose the use of some substances believed to be dangerous. TerraChoice, has written about the 7 most common misleading and deceptive tactics used by manufacturers and marketers, and they are as follows:

1. The **Sin of the Hidden Trade-off** suggests 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.
2. The **Sin of No Proof** happens when environmental assertions are not backed up by evidence or third-party certification. One common example is facial tissue products that claim various percentages of post-consumer recycled content without providing any supporting details.
3. The **Sin of Vagueness** occurs when a marketing claim is so lacking in specifics it becomes meaningless. "All-natural" is an example of this Sin. Arsenic, uranium, mercury, and formaldehyde are all naturally occurring, and poisonous. "All natural" isn't necessarily "green."
4. The **Sin of Worshipping False Labels** is when marketers create a false suggestion or certification-like image to mislead consumers into thinking that a product has been through a legitimate green certification process. One example of this sin is a brand of aluminum foil with certification-like images that show the name of the company's own in-house environmental program for which there is no explanation. This sin has been added to TerraChoice's list since it's previous report in 2007.
5. The **Sin of Irrelevance** arises when an environmental issue unrelated to the product is emphasized. One example is the claim that a product is "CFC-free," since CFCs are banned by law.
6. The **Sin of Lesser of Two Evils** occurs when an environmental claim makes consumers feel 'green' about a product

category that is itself lacking in environmental benefits. Organic cigarettes are an example of this phenomenon.

7. The **Sin of Fibbing** is when environmental claims are outright false. One common example is products falsely claiming to be Energy Star certified.

As marketers and manufacturers are working hard to deceive consumers to make their product appear as something it really is not, it is our duty as consumers to educate ourselves and be able to find the 2% of products that are actually natural. And here is how you can start:

- Don't trust the label as fact. Understand that just cause it says natural, does not mean it really is.
- Shop with a discerning eye. Trust your gut. If it is too good to be true it most likely is, and the claim is just advertising hype.
- Read the ingredients carefully. Fake natural products often will have a long list of ingredients full of chemicals that may be harmful.
- Compare similar products. Look at the ingredients of one product that claims to be natural and one that does not, and see if there are any differences.
- When in doubt check with a health professional.
- Research the product. How is it made and/or processed? What is the origin and source of the "natural" ingredients?

The complete findings of the 2009 TerraChoice study can be found [here](#).