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The Ins and Outs of Corporate Greenwashing

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The Ins and Outs of Corporate Greenwashing

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INTRODUCTION

The average citizen wants to help the environment, and everyday purchases make going green as easy as possible. The green product market makes approximately \$230 billion in the United States per year, and 40 percent of consumers choose eco-friendly items over other options.¹ Americans have this desire to go green, but they are unaware that the majority of their favorite companies are deceitful with their marketing and advertising.

Consumers are being fooled by corporate greenwashing, and they are not even aware of it. According to a 2008 survey conducted by communications agency Cone Inc., “48 percent of the population erroneously believes a product marketed as ‘green’ or ‘environmentally friendly’



has a positive (i.e. beneficial) impact on the environment.”² In the following year, out of the 2,219 products making green claims, “98 percent of those products were guilty of greenwashing.”³ Companies and corporations of all kinds have been committing this eco-unfriendly act since the beginnings of the green

movement of the 1970’s, and have been playing dirty ever since. With the raise in concern for the environment, especially with the campaign to stop global warming, corporations are being uncovered for their anti-environmentalism tactics by the government and grassroots organizations, all hoping to put an end to greenwashing once and for all.

¹ Horiuchi, Rina, et al. *Understanding and Preventing Greenwash: A Business Guide*. Futerra Sustainability Communications, 2009, p. 9.

² *Cone Releases 2008 Green Gap Survey*. Boston: Cone Inc., 15 Apr. 2008. *Cone Inc.* <<http://www.coneinc.com/content1136>>.

³ Dahl, Richard. “Green Washing: Do You Know What You’re Buying.” *Environmental Health Perspectives*; June 2010. Vol. 188, Iss. 6; p. A247.

WHAT IS GREENWASHING?

Different definitions of greenwashing are thrown around, but the real origins and definition are more complicated than one would think. The term “greenwashing” was created during the anti-corporate movement by American environmentalist Jay Westerveld in 1986. The word, included in the Oxford English Dictionary in 1999, is defined as, “Disinformation disseminated by an organization, etc., so as to present an environmentally responsible public image; a public image of environmental responsibility promulgated by or for an organization, but perceived as being unfounded or intentionally misleading.”⁴ In simpler terms, environmental corporation BSR defines the word as:

...A barrier to developing a sustainable economy. It can slow down sustainability efforts by making more people skeptical of environmental initiatives. Greenwashing also impedes consumers from understanding the impacts of their purchasing decisions as they struggle to differentiate between valid and invalid claims.⁵

Activists have also pointed out greenwashing in brand consumer marketing, as well. Such marketing examples include describing products as natural when they are actually genetically engineered, and claiming to be organic when the products manufactured are anything but.⁶

CULMINATION OF GREENWASHING

Despite how the term “greenwashing” was officially penned in the mid-1980s, the first real example of the dirty practice came around during the culmination of the first Earth Day in 1971. Keep America Beautiful, a coalition of companies that deal with glass, aluminum, paper, plastic, and solid waste, started the “Crying Indian” public service campaign. The advertisement, which illustrates Native American actor Iron Eyes Cody with a tear rolling down

⁴ “Greenwashing.” *Oxford English Dictionary*.

⁵ Horiuchi, p. 3.

⁶ Grant, John. *The Green Marketing Manifesto*. West Sussex: John Wiley & Sons Ltd., 2008: pg. 79.

his cheek at the sight of litter in the environment, was an “iconic symbol of environmental responsibility and one of the most successful PSA campaigns in history.”⁷ As the campaign earned the company over \$25 million per year in free airtime, “KAB opposed a national bottle bill that would have created a recycling deposit for glass bottles.”⁸



WHY DO CORPORATIONS GREENWASH?

The reasons why companies use greenwashing in their advertising are varied. A few businesses execute the dirty practice because they feel the pressure from other companies to excel. President of Los Angeles-based public relations (PR) firm Cerrell Associates Hal Dash says, “When you see corporate America doing green advertising it’s because they get hit so often by the environmental community. You have to let the public know what good you’re doing.”⁹ Other corporations greenwash because they are burdened by governmental pressures to ensure that their products are environmentally sound. Keith Miller, manager of environmental initiatives and sustainability at 3M says that in order to avoid government regulation, he tells companies (eco-friendly or not) that “any claims made should be specific to products and backed up by ‘compelling’ data.”¹⁰ There are even a few corporations that greenwash simply because they like to play dirty. In 2006, University of Michigan business professor Thomas P. Lyon and John W. Maxwell co-wrote, “[P]ublic outrage over corporate greenwash is more likely

⁷ "KAB: A Beautiful History. ." *Keep America Beautiful*. Keep America Beautiful, Inc., <http://www.kab.org/site/PageServer?pagename=kab_history>.

⁸ Helvarg, David. “Perception is Reality: Greenwashing Puts the Best Public Face on Corporate Irresponsibility.” *The Environmental Magazine*. Norwalk: Nov/Dec 1996. Vol. 7, Iss. 6; pg. 40.

⁹ Helvarg, p. 39.

¹⁰ Dahl, p. A250.

to induce a firm to become more open and transparent if the firm operates in an industry that is likely to have socially or environmentally damaging impacts, and if the firm is relatively well informed about its environmental social impacts.”¹¹ Probably the biggest reason why greenwashing is done by companies is perfectly defined by National Geographic Magazine Vice President Claudia Malley; “Companies have recognized the importance the environment plays for their long-term business operations, whether it’s manufacturing, product development, marketing and communications, or employee satisfaction.”¹²

BLAME PUBLIC RELATIONS

Corporate greenwash is nothing more than deception by public relations and phony campaigns that stem from the heads of corporate interests. PR veterans and corporations have had a specific aim since they have begun to launch a secondhand attack on the environment; they want the money of the consumer, and will play dirty to get what they want.

Creating the practice of environmental communications, E. Bruce Harrison was on the greenwash battlefield even before anybody knew what greenwashing was. In 1962, he led a campaign to discredit conservationist Rachel Carson’s Silent Spring. The book, which linked commercial pesticides to numerous health dangers, was a major threat to the pesticide industry. At age 30, Harrison “served as the pesticide industry’s ‘manager for environmental information’ charged with orchestrating the smear campaign against”¹³ Carson and the book. According to environmental activists, Harrison’s work “set back efforts to understand the

¹¹ Dahl, p. A250.

¹² Horiuchi, pg. 8.

¹³ Cronin, John, Al Gore, and Robert Francis Kennedy. *The Riverkeepers: Two Activists Fight to Reclaim Our Environment as a Basic Human Right*. New York, NY: Touchstone, 1999: pg. 236.

environmental roots of many diseases...several years.”¹⁴ After tarnishing the words and reputation of one of America’s most well-known environmentalists, he went on to open his own PR firm in 1973 and wrote a handful of books to teach corporations how to greenwash. One such book, 1993’s Going Green: How to Communicate Your Company’s Environmental Commitment, he suggested that “companies meet with citizens who criticize them, listen but reveal little information, and research their opponents, even if it means hiring private detectives to spy on them.”¹⁵

One of the biggest parts Harrison played in greenwashing during his reign is helping create the hypocritically anti-green Global Climate Coalition. Created in 1989, the international lobbying group (which included groups like BP, Exxon Mobil, Shell and other oil bigwigs) was set up solely to “cast skepticism on climate change and...undermine support for the Kyoto Protocol, the international pact in which industrialized nations agreed to reduce their greenhouse gas emissions.”¹⁶ The biggest controversy that came out of the Coalition, though, was how they ignored their own scientists’ warnings regarding global warming. Environmentalists and scientists alike were aware about humans impacting rising global temperatures, but the evidence was ignored “for the sake of companies’ fight against curbs on greenhouse gas emissions.”¹⁷ By questioning these environmental claims, the Coalition, “were able to sow

¹⁴ Cottle, Michelle. "Hellbound." *Mother Jones Magazine* Sept.-Oct. 1994: pg. 19.

¹⁵ Helvarg, pg. 41.

¹⁶ Frey, Darcy. "How Green Is BP?" *The New York Times Magazine* 8 Dec. 2002: *The New York Times*. <<http://www.nytimes.com/2002/12/08/magazine/how-green-is-bp.html>>: pg. 2.

¹⁷ Revkin, Andrew C. "Industry Ignores Its Scientists on Climate." *The New York Times* 23 April 2009: *The New York Times*. <<http://www.nytimes.com/2009/04/24/science/earth/24deny.html>>.

enough doubt to blunt public concern about a consequential issue and delay government action.”¹⁸

Green PR has been boosted by the growth of Americans caring more and more about environmental issues over the past 35 years. After PR disasters such as the Union Carbide gas leak in Bhopal, India, that killed 3,000 people in 1984¹⁹, and the Exxon Valdez oil spill that leaked 42 million liters of crude oil in the Prince William Sound in Alaska in 1989²⁰, green communications went into overdrive to clean up their messes. Upon the 20th anniversary of Earth Day in 1990, a “life-and-death PR battle”²¹ had begun between conservative and liberal media due to corporate involvement with that year’s festivities. While right-wing publications such as *Conservative Digest* and *The National Review* classified Earth Day environmentalism as “pitiless and messianic as Marxism [with] a consciousness alien to all that is human,”²² the left-wing *Fortune Magazine* reassured that environmentalism would become “more cooperative than confrontational – and with business at the center.”²³

One of the sneakiest way companies currently brainwash is fooling the consumers into thinking they’re the good guys with the creation of fake environmental campaigns. This practice is called Astroturf, “a term coined by former Texas senator Lloyd Bentsen to describe phony grassroots movements put together by major corporate interests to advance their agendas.”²⁴

¹⁸ Revkin, *The New York Times*.

¹⁹ *Statement of Union Carbide Corporation Regarding the Bhopal Tragedy*. Union Carbide Corporation, 2001.

²⁰ Graham, Sarah. "Environmental Effects of Exxon Valdez Spill Still Being Felt." *Scientific American* 19 Dec. 2003: *Scientific American*.

<<http://www.scientificamerican.com/article.cfm?id=environmental-effects-of>>.

²¹ Helvarg, pg. 39.

²² Helvarg, pg. 39.

²³ Helvarg, ph. 39.

²⁴ Helvarg, pg. 40.

Astrourfing is often used in political propaganda, but corporations have the ability to spin their unethical practices to make themselves look better than they really are.

The so-called “Wise Use” movement in the 1980’s during the Pacific Northwest “timber wars” was the perfect opportunity to broadcast messages its founders have held in for more than a decade. The organizers of the movement, political entrepreneurs Ron Arnold and Alan Gottlieb, had initially “aggressively promoted disinformation campaigns that discredit environmentalists by calling them ‘pagans,’ ‘eco-nazis’ and ‘communists.’”²⁵ Not only that, but according to *Public Eye Magazine* writer William Kevin Burke, “The movement’s signature public relations tactic [was] to frame complex environmental and economic issues in simple, scapegoating terms that benefit[ed] its corporate backers.”²⁶ Arnold and Gottlieb targeted federal lands and desired to open them to logging, mining and off-road driving. To influence workers that their idea was good, the duo proposed:

...Almost the only environmental problem *The Wise Use Agenda* addresse[d] rather than dismisse[d was] the threat of global warming from the build-up of carbon dioxide in the earth’s atmosphere. The solution proposed [was] the immediate clear-cutting of the small portion of old growth timber left in the United States so that these forests [could] be replanted with young trees that [would] absorb more carbon dioxide.²⁷

To give an extra push to their cause, the entrepreneurs bribed workers with “free buses, box lunches and full pay to [the] employees to demonstrate against spotted owl protections that were limiting commercial logging on public lands.”²⁸ As a result of the “jobs versus owls”

²⁵ Rampton, Sheldon. "Fish Out of Water: Behind the Wise Use Movement's Victory in Klamath." *The Center for Media and Democracy PR Watch*. Center for Media and Democracy, Spring 2003. <<http://www.prwatch.org/prwissues/2003Q2/fish.html>>.

²⁶ Burke, William Kevin. "The Wise Use Movement: Right-Wing Anti-Environmentalism." *Public Eye Magazine* June 1993: pg. 3.

²⁷ Burke, pg. 4.

²⁸ Helvarg, pg. 41.

movement, it “helped spark an anti-green backlash that has defeated river protection efforts and threatens to open millions of acres of wilderness to resource extraction.”²⁹

THE GREENWASHING BOOM

As the amount of green products on the market has risen over the years, the amount of greenwashing has also exploded. The “eco-friendly” trend really took off in the late 80’s into



the early 90’s, where the amount of “green” products that hit the store shelves spiked from 60 per year to more than 800 between 1986 and 1991.³⁰

Unfortunately for consumers, the majority of eco-friendly products that they purchased were not environmentally safe. According to a report in the *Journal of Public Policy and Marketing* from 1991, “58 percent of environmental ads sampled contained at least one misleading or deceptive claim.”³¹ Flash forward to nearly two decades later and greenwashing is more of a significant problem.

False environmentally related claims are also exponentially rising in all forms of media. Although television advertising remains the number one media channel for communicating sustainability initiatives and “green” products³², greenwashing is popping up more and more in print media and blog coverage. Between 2006 and 2007, greenwash coverage increased more

²⁹ Burke, pg. 4.

³⁰ Helvar, pg. 39.

³¹ Helvar, pg. 39.

³² De Dios Lopez, Sara, Coleen Kuehn, and Mahesh Krishna. *Havas Media Brand Sustainable Futures 2010: Country Factsheet USA*. 2010, pg. 2.

than 135 percent for the ten most widely read U.S. publications, and more than 2,300 stories were written regarding corporate greenwashing.³³ Even though magazines and newspapers were reporting about environmentally-unfriendly actions, the editors still published advertisements for “green” products that may or may not have been eco-friendly. Between 2006 and 2009, “the number [of green advertising in major magazines] mushroomed from about 3.5 percent of all ads to just over 10 percent today.”³⁴ Meanwhile, blog exposure of greenwashing exploded in the latter portion of the 2000s. Between 2005 and 2008, the number of blogs mentioning greenwash multiplied by 550, “growing from 61 to 33,573 posts.”³⁵ A lot of blog coverage focuses on bad business ethics, especially in advertising. Nielsen reports that “25 percent of greenwash discussions of blogs in 2007 addressed ‘contradictory actions’ by companies, while only 17 percent focused on ‘general suspicion’.”³⁶

BIG BUSINESS AND GREENWASHING

Every day, new outlets for greenwashing seem to emerge, thus letting it flourish all over the globe.³⁷ While big brands in the oil, electric, automotive and fast food industries shamelessly greenwash on a constant basis, some supposed “cleaner” brands and products also get in on the unashamed action. Regardless, all offenders are damaging their reputations and the trust of their loyal customers.

³³ Horiuchi, pg. 22.

³⁴ Dahl, p. A247.

³⁵ Horiuchi, pg. 23.

³⁶ Bausch, Suzy, and Michelle McGiboney. *Online Consumers Call for Greater Transparency in Strategies for Environmental Sustainability, According to Nielsen Online*. New York: Nielsen Online, 31 Mar. 2008: pg. 2.

³⁷ Bruno, Kenny, and Jed Greer. *Greenwash: The Reality Behind Corporate Environmentalism*. Penang: Third World Network, 1996: pg. 41.

General Electrics

General Electric (GE) is trying to cash in on the environmental movement with their Ecomagination campaign, but fails to uncover many vital flaws GE made on the down-low. The electric juggernaut has spent an immense amount of money annually on the campaign since its inception in May 2005, including \$90 million in advertising³⁸ and \$1.5 billion in new research into clean technology³⁹. According to GE Chairman and CEO Jeff Immelt, the goals of Ecomagination are not all moral, stating that the campaign aims “to address challenges such as the need for cleaner, more efficient sources of energy, reduced emissions and abundant sources of clean water, and we plan to make money doing it.”⁴⁰



As the energy company rakes in the money for Ecomagination, they also neglect to acknowledge the ways in which they’re secretly harming the environment. Although the company proclaims that they are going to clean up their surroundings, GE strongly believes in the power of nuclear energy. Although GE’s nuclear plants produce “nearly zero greenhouse gas emissions during operation,”⁴¹ nuclear energy is not a renewable energy source (uranium is a scarce resource) and the radioactive isotopes that come from the element can contaminate the immediate area surrounding it when mining and

³⁸ Grant, pg. 82.

³⁹ Grant, pg. 104.

⁴⁰ Sheffer, Gary. *GE Launches Ecomagination to Develop Environmental Technologies; Company-Wide Focus on Addressing Pressing Challenges*. Fairfield: General Electrics, 9 May 2005: pg. 1.

⁴¹ "Ecomagination Nuclear Energy ." *GE Ecomagination*. General Electric Company, 2011. <<http://www.ecomagination.com/technologies/nuclear-energy/>>.

refining the material.⁴² Along with this, GE's power plant along the Hudson River has contaminated 197 miles of the body of water with polychlorinated biphenyl (PCBs) from 1947 to as late as 2007, two years after the Ecomagination program began.⁴³

BP



Out of all the oil companies in America, BP is the one that is always cited when it comes to greenwashing. Operating in more than 100 countries (with over 15,500 service stations in the United States alone) with gross revenue of \$174 billion, BP is the world's second-largest oil company in the world and produces almost 3.5

billion barrels of oil and gas per year.⁴⁴ The oil company has been spending millions of dollars rebranding their image for the better. Originally named British Petroleum, BP adopted a new slogan, "Beyond Petroleum"⁴⁵ in an attempt to show their commitment to finding and using cleaner energy. To introduce their new slogan, the company targeted New Yorkers and tourists in Times Square with a high-saturated ad campaign. The advertisements proclaimed that BP was "the first to publicly recognize the risks of global climate change" and "believes in alternative energy. Like solar and cappuccino."⁴⁶

⁴² Lai, Leslie, and Kristen Morrison. "Nuclear Energy Fact Sheet." *Nuclear Age Peace Foundation*. Nuclear Age Peace Foundation, 2011. <<http://www.wagingpeace.org/menu/issues/nuclear-energy-&-waste/nuclear-energy-fact-sheet.htm>>.

⁴³ "Historic Hudson River Cleanup to Begin After Years of Delay, But Will General Electric Finish the Job?" *Natural Resources Defense Council*. Natural Resources Defense Council, 23 Mar. 2007. <<http://www.nrdc.org/water/pollution/hudson.asp>>.

⁴⁴ Frey, pg. 1.

⁴⁵ "About BP." *BP*. BP, 2011. Web. 10 Apr. 2011. <<http://www.bp.com/sectiongenericarticle.do?categoryId=9028308&contentId=7019491>>.

⁴⁶ Frey, pg. 1.

For a while, the company was on a path to environmental betterment. In the 1990s, BP blocked oil leaks to reduce carbon emissions and future oil spills, and later focused their attentions and investments in alternative energy sources.⁴⁷ The Financial Times even commended the oil giant for protecting the environment in 2001, stating, “In the case of BP, however, there appears to be near consensus that it has made exceptional efforts to replenish environmental resources, develop alternative fuels and communicate with stakeholders.”⁴⁸

However, their aggressive marketing blew up in their faces after their true morals and values were exposed. BP was involved in two of the biggest oil disasters in the 2000s. The first, an explosion at a Texas City refinery in March 2005 that killed 15 workers and sent harmful gases wafting through the surrounding area, showed the neglect of safety going on behind the scenes at the oil company (some equipment even decayed to the point where it was normal for the machinery to malfunction upon start-up).⁴⁹ The latter, where a dangerously corroded pipeline on Alaska’s North Slope leaked 200 million gallons of crude oil onto tundra and a frozen lake just a few months later,⁵⁰ illustrates how the company ignored safety standards. In exchange for making the public forget about their triumphant mistakes, BP decided to donate \$4 million to the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation.⁵¹ Unfortunately for the Foundation and every other conservation group that BP donated funds to, the company bragged about their

⁴⁷ Grant, pg. 84.

⁴⁸ Maitland, Alison. "World's Most Respected Companies 2001." *Financial Times* 13 Dec. 2001. *Financial Times* . <<http://specials.ft.com/wmr2001/FT3K4GNQ6VC.html>>.

⁴⁹ MacDonald, Christine. *Green, Inc. An Environmental Insider Reveals How a Good Cause Has Gone Bad*. Guilford, CT: The Lyons Press, 2008: pg. 100.

⁵⁰ MacDonald, pg. 100-101.

⁵¹ MacDonald, pg. 101.

philanthropist ways. The oil bigwigs produced glossy publications and web sites “touting its good corporate behavior.”⁵²

ExxonMobil

Before BP became the King of Greenwashing, ExxonMobil lead the way in anti-green initiatives, unbeknownst to most of their customers. Commencing with the tragic Exxon *Valdez* oil disaster off the coast of Alaska, killing millions of animals and racking up approximately \$1.1 billion in fines⁵³, the oil giant has been continuously in hot heat with the federal government. The company, which earns more than \$339 billion per year, is probably best known for convincing the media and much of the country that global warming ceases to exist.

As a result of raising doubts about indisputable scientific evidence by using scientists to misrepresent scientific findings, ExxonMobil prevented vital environmental laws from being passed and negatively shaped government communications on global warming. Being part of the Global Climate Coalition, it was the oil bigwig’s goal to brainwash their consumers that global warming was nothing but a myth. In 1998, Exxon helped create a task force, the Global Climate Science Team (GCST), to outline “an explicit strategy to invest millions of dollars to manufacture uncertainty on the issue of global warming”⁵⁴ Even though the scientific evidence on global warming was extremely strong by the end of the 1990s, the oil company sought to support groups that worked with the minority of scientists who strongly voiced doubts about the consequences of human-caused global warming.⁵⁵ Two such scientists, astrophysicists Willie Soon and Sallie Baliunas, published a controversial article about global warming in the

⁵² MacDonald, pg. 101.

⁵³ MacDonald, pg. 99.

⁵⁴ *Smoke, Mirrors & Hot Air: How ExxonMobil Uses Big Tobacco’s Tactics to Manufacture Uncertainty on Climate Science*. Cambridge: Union of Concerned Scientists, 2007: pg. 10.

⁵⁵ Union of Concerned Scientists, pg. 14.

journal *Climate Research*. In their piece, both argued that the climate in the twentieth century had not changed significantly, therefore that “natural variability, not human activity, was the ‘overwhelming factor’ influencing climate change.”⁵⁶ As a result of like-minded politicians believing these false reports, along with ExxonMobil having close ties with members of Congress,⁵⁷ Congress passed the Energy Policy Act of 2005 in July of that year. The bill, “modeled on [President George W. Bush’s] 2001 energy plan, provided more than \$7.4 billion in tax breaks and subsidies to the oil and gas industry over 10 years and excluded any provisions that would mandate reductions in U.S. global warming emissions.”⁵⁸

While convincing the government to halt any progress towards reversing global warming, Exxon Mobil ironically teamed up with one of the country’s elite universities to launch a multimillion dollar research project for “clean energy”. The company teamed up with Stanford University to launch a decade-long, \$225 million study called the Global Climate and Energy Project in the beginning of 2003. The goal of the project was to “involve researchers from Stanford and institutions around the world in developing a portfolio of clean-energy technology, as well as techniques for controlling greenhouse gases produced by traditional fuels.”⁵⁹ However, the project didn’t mark a change in the company’s attitude towards climate change. Instead, Brian Flannery, manager of science, strategy and programs at Exxon, said that the company still believed “a lot of climate change science is ‘uncertain’ and that forced reductions in emissions aren’t realistic solutions to a 100-year problem. Creating a range of new

⁵⁶ Union of Concerned Scientists, pg. 15.

⁵⁷ Union of Concerned Scientists, pg. 22.

⁵⁸ Union of Concerned Scientists, pg. 22.

⁵⁹ Blumenstyk, Goldie. “Greening the World or ‘Greenwashing’ a Reputation?” *The Chronicle of Higher Education*. Washington: Jan 10, 2003. Vol. 49, Iss. 18: pg. A22.

technologies is the way to address climate change.”⁶⁰ Thus, the company enforces that the school focuses on research for “finding cleaner ways to use fossil fuels”, since “the cleanest energy sources – wind, solar and fuel cells – would never be economical enough or reliable enough to meet future global energy demand.”⁶¹

General Motors

Oil companies are not the only major corporations to play the greenwashing game. The world’s number one manufacturer of motor vehicles, General Motors Corporation, is also the number one contributor to air pollution in the world.⁶² With each effort they make to try to cover up their anti-environmentalism actions, GM is continuously knocked down by statistics that nip them in the bud.

To compensate for how much they destroy the world’s air, GM unsuccessfully launched a program of planting a tree for every car sold in their Geo division. Each small car was equipped with Geo Tree logo labels and certificates of authenticity from the U.S. Forest Service to prove its eco-friendliness.⁶³ In a 2005 report, GM boasted about their program’s performance, stating, “GM’s Geo Tree Planting Program has resulted in over one million trees being planted, sequestering an estimated 6,740 metric tons of CO₂ in 2005 and sequestering 42,738 metric tons of CO₂ since its inception in 1990.”⁶⁴ Unfortunately, one million



⁶⁰ Blumenstyk, pg. A23.

⁶¹ Blumenstyk, pg. A24.

⁶² Bruno, pg. 161.

⁶³ Bruno, pg. 162.

⁶⁴ *Voluntary Reporting of General Motors Corporation United States Greenhouse Gas (GHG) Emissions for Calendar Years 1990-2005*. Detroit: General Motors Corporation, 2006: pg. 3.

trees aren't enough to fix their previous destruction. In order to "counteract the amount of carbon dioxide produced by a single Geo car, GM would have to plant 734 trees over the estimated ten-year lifetime of each vehicle. Furthermore, planting trees does not mitigate the impact of other automobile pollutants."⁶⁵

The automakers made another attempt at giving the eco-friendly people what they wanted, but their more high-tech plan backfired. In January 2008, in commemoration of its 100th birthday, General Motors launched an interactive website, gmnext, which aimed to stimulate discussion on future automotive technologies.⁶⁶ Unfortunately, users remembered their history with trying to take down environmental laws. GM had previously "lobbied against fuel efficiency and has sponsored political action committees (PACs), which give campaign contributions to US political candidates to oppose tighter emission standards."⁶⁷ After the excessive backlash the site was receiving from the public, the company quickly eliminated the website before it could continue to grow into a bigger mess.

Wal-Mart

Out of the retail giants, Wal-Mart takes first place in the greenwashing department for making false environmental claims with their products and goods. Throwing their hat into the environmental movement in the fourth quarter of 2005, Wal-Mart's environmental goals with simple: "to be supplied 100 percent by renewable energy; to create zero waste; and to sell products that sustain our resources and our environment."⁶⁸ The big-time retailer also announced plans in 2009 to develop a global sustainability index with their 15,000 product

⁶⁵ Bruno, pg. 162.

⁶⁶ MacDonald, pg. 70.

⁶⁷ Bruno, pg. 162.

⁶⁸ MacDonald, pg. 152.

suppliers to “establish a single source of data for evaluating the sustainability of products.”⁶⁹

Part of the initiative included a survey consisting of 15 questions that focused on topics such as energy and climate; material efficiency; natural resources; and community. Questions such as, “Have you measured your corporate greenhouse gas emissions?” and, “Before beginning a business relationship with a manufacturing facility, do you evaluate the quality of, and capacity for, production?” are supposed to highlight transparency in the supply chain.

Despite their push for a more sustainable corporation, Wal-Mart only received mixed reviews for their efforts. Environmentalists gave the big-box chain hell for solely tackling the easiest part of their environmental implications: “reducing its carbon footprint, thus cutting back on its greenhouse gas emissions.”⁷⁰ One section where they didn’t tackle their widespread air pollution, though, is with their “Love, Earth” jewelry line the company launched in 2008. Wal-Mart teamed up with Florida-based jewelry manufacturer Aurafin to create a line that is made in conditions that favor the workers and the environment. The jewelry line was uncovered as flawed by the Broward-Palm Beach New Times, where it was discovered:

Love, Earth's gold comes from U.S. mines no more environmentally friendly than other mining operations, which critics say are responsible for widespread pollution. The precious metal's journey then goes to Bolivia, where Maria and Julia and thousands of other workers toil — many in conditions much worse than the two women's — for the benefit of the U.S. companies. While Love, Earth may shine like gold, that's only varnish. Underneath, its anatomy is greenwash: The product is no better for the environment — or the people who manufacture it — than a standard piece of jewelry.⁷¹

⁶⁹ *Walmart Announces Sustainable Product Index*. Bentonville: Wal-Mart, 16 July 2009.

⁷⁰ MacDonald, pg. 152.

⁷¹ Friedman-Rudovsky, Jean. "Walmart's 'Love, Earth' Jewelry Line Doesn't Live Up to Green Promises."

Broward-Palm Beach New Times 6 Jan. 2011: *Broward-Palm Beach New Times*.

<<http://www.browardpalmbeach.com/2011-01-06/news/walmart-s-love-earth-jewelry-line-doesn-t-live-up-to-green-promises/1/>>.

However, the biggest problem with Wal-Mart's sustainability efforts is that they know that the immense size of their superstores make it impossible to make improvements to the environment. As discovered by Stacy Mitchell of *Grist* magazine:

At current growth rates, by 2015 Wal-Mart will have enlarged its domestic footprint by 20,000 acres, turning CO₂-absorbing fields and forests into stores and parking lots...Wal-Mart's new stores will use more electricity than its energy-efficiency measures will save. By making its existing outlets 20 percent more efficient, Wal-Mart says it will cut CO₂ emissions by 2.5 million metric tons by 2013. But new stores built this year alone will consume enough electricity to add about 1 million metric tons of CO₂ to the atmosphere.⁷²

Not only that, but Wal-Mart stores are also known to take over millions of square feet of ecosystems to build their superstores and, more problematically, parking lots. The lots have gotten the retail store in a bountiful of trouble from environmental protection officials "for allowing storm water contaminated with gas and other petroleum products to run off into surrounding ecosystems, damaging wetlands and killing fish."⁷³ Mitchell comments on the harm that Wal-Mart is provoking on the consumers from feeding them false hope and intentions, stating:

This cannot be dismissed as greenwashing. It's actually far more dangerous than that. Wal-Mart's initiatives have just enough meat to have distracted much of the environmental movement...the fundamental fact that...big-box retailing is as intrinsically unsustainable as clear-cut logging is as a method of harvesting trees.⁷⁴

McDonalds

The King of Fast Food, McDonalds, is continuously met with complaints for their unfriendly actions toward the environment and for their greenwashing. The burger juggernaut is trying to improve their image by bringing about eco-friendly practices. In the past few years

⁷² Mitchell, Stacy. "The Impossibility of a Green Wal-Mart." *Grist* 28 Mar. 2007: *Grist Magazine* . <<http://www.grist.org/article/mitchell>>.

⁷³ MacDonald, pg. 153.

⁷⁴ Mitchell, *Grist*.



alone, they have opened a “green” restaurant in Chicago, Illinois, that uses 25 percent less energy than a typical McDonalds⁷⁵, along with creating a new kind of food packaging made out of renewable raw materials, such as wood fiber and other elements from nature.⁷⁶ However, the company has faltered along the way. One such

example is their anti-Styrofoam campaign they launched in the late 1980’s, only to contradict themselves 20 years later with the introduction of wasteful cups for their Sweet Tea.

Environmental groups and consumers alike were enraged over McDonald’s use of Styrofoam packaging, and the fast food chain complied with most of the complaints while devising a plan to reintroduce Styrofoam to their restaurants in the late 2000s. Beginning in the summer of 1987, local community activists from the organization Vermonters Organized for Clean Up picketed several McDonald’s restaurants in the state for using polystyrene foam for packaging their food.⁷⁷ Vermonter’s picketing led the way for other protests across the country, from Berkley, California (which signed an ordinance that would ban the use of some plastic packaging by fast-food restaurants⁷⁸) and Glen Cove, New York. Executive director of New York’s Consumer Protection Board, Richard M. Kessel, said that the burger joint would perform

⁷⁵ Goodman, Matthew. "Big Mac, hold the CO2." *The Sunday Times*. Times Newspapers, 5 Apr. 2009. <http://business.timesonline.co.uk/tol/business/industry_sectors/retailing/article6035749.ece>.

⁷⁶ *McDonald's Corporation Worldwide Corporate Social Responsibility 2010 Report*. <http://www.aboutmcdonalds.com/etc/medialib/csr/docs.Par.32488.File.tmp/mcd063_2010%20PDFreport_v9.pdf>.

⁷⁷ *McDonald's Restaurants Limited v. Helen Marie Steel and David Morris*. 11 July 1994. *EJnet.org: Web Resources for Environmental Justice Activists*. Action Pennsylvania. <http://www.ejnet.org/plastics/polystyrene/mclibel_p6.html#history>.

⁷⁸ Gutis, Philip S. "McDonald's Is Urged to Alter Packaging." *The New York Times* 11 Nov. 1987: A2.

"a great service to the state of New York" if it would "discontinue Styrofoam packaging and instead expand its use of paper products made from recycled material."⁷⁹ The reason why the nation was in such an uproar over Styrofoam packaging was explained in a 1990 edition of *Time* magazine:

The material is nonbiodegradable and can give off toxic fumes when burned. The food industry uses more than 1 billion lbs. of the material every year to pack its products. McDonald's (1989 sales: \$17 billion) is the world's largest single consumer. Each day 22 million customers buy food in 11,000 of its outlets in 52 countries. An estimated 30 percent of the food is wrapped in polystyrene packages, which means that McDonald's customers toss out more than 45 million lbs. of so-called clamshell boxes and other polystyrene waste each year.⁸⁰

In response to all the criticism being thrown their way, McDonalds teamed up with the Environmental Defense Fund (EDF) to rid of their "polystyrene clamshell food containers in an effort to significantly reduce its environmental impact by cutting solid waste."⁸¹ E. Bruce Harrison commented on the corporate-environmental "partnership", saying that the business relationship "took away a lot of the burdens that had been put on [McDonalds]."⁸² As a direct result of their collaboration, the company reduced their sandwich packaging volume 70 to 90 percent due to switching from Styrofoam clamshells to paper-based wraps, eliminating about 300 million pounds of packaging.⁸³

McDonalds, however, neglected to rid of Styrofoam from their beverage menu. In 2008, the fast food chain heavily promoted their new \$1 Sweet Tea they introduced to their menu. It

⁷⁹ Gutis, *The New York Times*, A2.

⁸⁰ Castro, Janice, Barbara Dolan, and Lisa Towle. "One Big Mac, Hold the Box!" *Time* 25 June 1990: *Time*. <<http://www.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,970470,00.html>>.

⁸¹ Janin, Melanie, and Lisa McComb. *McDonald's and Environmental Defense Fund Mark 20 Years of Partnerships for Sustainability*. Washington, D.C. and Oak Brook, Ill.: 15 Nov. 2010.

⁸² Helvarg, pg. 41.

⁸³ "Better Packaging with McDonald's." *Environmental Defense Fund*. 2010. <<http://business.edf.org/casestudies/better-packaging-mcdonalds>>.

may sound like a steal, except the company uses grandiose cups to pour the tea into. In

response to these complaints, an anonymous McDonalds spokesperson commented:

It's true that in the U.S., food service cups of any material are not recycled significantly. We look to optimize life cycle impacts as opposed to only "end-of-life" impacts. This means that we'll evaluate a package for impacts across many criteria (e.g., weight, resource use, recyclability) as opposed to only selecting the package based on its ability to be recycled .⁸⁴

What the representative did not mention, though, is how harmful their Sweet Tea cups are for the environment. Styrofoam takes approximately 500 years to decompose,⁸⁵ and the extra wax that coats the McDonalds cups probably makes the decomposing ever slower.

Mattel

In probably the most absurd case of greenwashing, Mattel, Inc. jumped on the green bandwagon and tried to make Barbie into an eco-activist. In 2008, Mattel launched a limited

edition line of eco-friendly accessories called the Barbie[®] BCause that would be sold exclusively at Toys R' Us. In the press release, the toy company insisted that the BCause collection reuses excess



fabric and trimmings from other Barbie[®] clothing and collections, giving eco-conscious girls a way to make an environmentally-friendly fashion statement.⁸⁶ In addition, Senior Vice President of Global Marketing, Media and Entertainment, Richard Dickson, commented on the eco-friendly line, saying:

⁸⁴ Cheeseman, Gina-Marie. "McDonald's and Greenwashing." *Triple Pundit*. Ed. Jen Boynton. 8 Aug. 2008. <<http://www.triplepundit.com/2008/08/mcdonalds-and-greenwashing/>>.

⁸⁵ Little, Mark. "Facts About Landfill & Styrofoam." *Livestrong.com*. Demand Media, Inc., 31 Mar. 2011. <<http://www.livestrong.com/article/159954-facts-about-landfill-styrofoam/>>.

⁸⁶ Dougherty, Lauren, and Katie Phillips. *Barbie® Introduces "Barbie™ Bcause," A Limited Edition Collection of Eco-Friendly Accessories for Girls*. El Segundo, California: Mattel, 1 Apr. 2008.

Barbie is always a reflection of current cultural trends and issues, and girls are increasingly aware of making a green statement. Barbie BCause is for eco-conscious girls who believe that being environmentally-friendly is the right thing to do, and we are thrilled to give extra meaning and extra style to what was once just extra Barbie doll fabric.⁸⁷

Eco-families, though, were far from convinced at Mattel's attempts at going green, and lashed out over the World Wide Web. Regarding Mattel's greenwashing, one mommy blogger, Jennifer Lance, said, "If a green girl wants a patchwork bag, she will make it from her own clothing she has outgrown and not Barbie's."⁸⁸ Jen Philips, another blogger, commented on the environmentally unfriendly Barbie model, stating, "Barbie dolls themselves are made out of plastic and are packaged in even more plastic. And not the kind of plastic you can throw in the recycling bin, either."⁸⁹ However, you can attempt to make the longest chain of Barbie dolls circling the globe; all the Barbies sold since 1959 could circle the globe at least seven times.⁹⁰

EFFECTS OF GREENWASHING

As a result of greenwashing, companies are fooling customers into thinking they are making better environmental decisions. Worldwide, more than half (53 percent) of the population prefers to purchase products and goods from companies with a good environmental reputation, including 42 percent of the American population.⁹¹ However, people have turned skeptical and indifferent towards environmental consciousness because they have either been bombarded with green messages or have been betrayed by the companies that they previously trusted. In a poll conducted by the Natural Marketing Institute, 34 percent of the American

⁸⁷ Dougherty and Phillips, "Barbie™ Bcause": Mattel.

⁸⁸ Lance, Jennifer. "The Ultimate Greenwashing: Barbie Goes Green." *Eco Child's Play*. 1 May 2008. <<http://ecochildsplay.com/2008/05/01/the-ultimate-greenwashing-barbie-goes-green/>>.

⁸⁹ Phillips, Jen. "Eco-Barbie? Mattel Gives This 'Green' Thingamajig a Whirl." *Mother Jones*. Foundation for National Progress, 22 Apr. 2008. <<http://motherjones.com/blue-marble/2008/04/eco-barbie-mattel-gives-green-thingamajig-whirl>>.

⁹⁰ "Eco-parents unimpressed by 'green' Barbie accessories." *Grist*. Grist Magazine, Inc. , 12 May 2008. <<http://www.grist.org/article/barbie1>>.

⁹¹ *Corporate Environmental Behavior and the Impact on Brand Values*. Tandberg Cisco, October 2007, pg. 6.

population says “they are constantly surrounded by talk about the environment.”⁹² In addition, a Havas Media survey claims that 64 percent of consumers viewed sustainability and other environmental claims as “marketing tool[s]”.⁹³ These doubts are due in part to, “the continued disconnect between consumer intent and behavior when it comes to purchasing responsible goods and services (i.e. it is not a case of consumers being fickle) but rather a case of businesses being perceived as unauthentic.”⁹⁴ If the majority of companies are claiming to be “green” and not delivering, people will stop caring about trying to make a difference at the checkout.

EFFORTS TO STOP GREENWASHING

Despite all the hoopla surrounding corporations’ dirty deeds, there is a bit of hope in the forms of governmental and grassroots campaigns to put an end to greenwashing. As government organizations, like the Federal Trade Commission (FTC), continuously draft up guidelines for companies to follow when planning their marketing, other lesser-known organizations are stepping up and forming anti-greenwashing initiatives of their own.

Federal Trade Commission

One of the biggest initiatives to combat greenwashing is the FTC’s Guides for the Use of Environmental Marketing Claims (most commonly known as the Green Guides). Originally created in 1992⁹⁵ and revamped in 2010 to “[make] it harder for businesses to tout the

⁹² “The Media’s Key Role in ‘Greenwashing Washout’.” *Environmental Leader*. 4 August 2008. <<http://www.environmentalleader.com/2008/08/04/the-medias-key-role-in-greenwashing-washout>>.

⁹³ Warner, Suzie. *New research shows that despite the economic recession, consumers still place considerable value on sustainability*. Havas Media, 29 Apr. 2009, pg. 3.

⁹⁴ Warner, pg. 3.

⁹⁵ Dahl, p. A248.



environmental benefits of their products”⁹⁶, the Green Guides “help businesses that want to market their products as green to understand the limits of what can be claimed in an advertisement and what substantiation for environmental claims is necessary.”⁹⁷

They also provide guidance for companies engaged in eco-

marketing in terms of “substantiation, specificity, general claims,

seal of approval, and eco-seals/certification.”⁹⁸ According to the latest proposal of the Green

Guides drafted by the FTC in October 2010, some general principles that they would require for

environmental claims are:

- Marketers should not make unqualified general environmental benefit claims. They are difficult, if not impossible to substantiate.
- Qualifications should be clear and prominent, and should limit the claim to a specific benefit. Marketers should ensure the advertisement’s context does not imply deceptive environmental claims.
- Marketers should not make unqualified renewable energy claims if the power used to manufacture any part of the product was derived from fossil fuels.
- Marketers should disclose if the offset purchase funds emission reductions that will not occur for two years or longer.⁹⁹

While the outlines of the FTC may look like serious business, they cannot be enforced.

According to Thomas Lyon, director of the Erb Institute for Global Sustainable Enterprise at the

University of Michigan, “What [the public] need[s] is a system that will allow companies to

credibly make these types of broad claims. That’s really hard, and I think it’s still a number of

⁹⁶ Nelson, Gabriel, and Amanda Peterka. “FTC Proposes Crackdown on ‘Greenwashing.’” *The New York Times* 6 Oct. 2010: *NYTimes.com*. <<http://www.nytimes.com/gwire/2010/10/06/06greenwire-ftc-proposes-crackdown-on-greenwashing-42606.html>>.

⁹⁷ Baker, Keri-Ann C. and Michelle Diffenderfer. “Greenwashing: What Your Client Should Know to Avoid Costly Litigation and Consumer Backlash.” *Natural Resources & Environment*. Chicago: Winter 2011. Vol. 25, Iss. 3; pg. 22.

⁹⁸ Baker and Diffenderfer, pg. 21.

⁹⁹ United States. Federal Trade Commission. *Green Guides Summary of Proposal*. Washington: 2010.

years off.”¹⁰⁰ Up to 2009, the FTC made 37 rulings regarding environmental claims. However, they all took place prior to 2001.¹⁰¹

Grassroots Campaigns

Despite a lack of a proper system to debunk environmental claims, many independent campaigns have arisen to take down companies that depend on greenwashing to trick their customers. Thanks to the powers of the Internet, several grassroots movements have taken a life of their own and older environmental crusades have been given new life.

The biggest grassroots organization (also one of the first) to take on greenwashing is Greenpeace. Forming in the 1970s when dishonest green advertising started to take place, Greenpeace began fighting greenwashing in the early 1990s with the publication of their book, Greenpeace Book of Greenwash, highlighting the most egregious examples of corporate greenwash at the moment (including notorious names such as General Motors, Shell, and Mitsubishi).¹⁰² Nowadays the organization “monitors alleged greenwash ads and provides other information on identifying and combating greenwashing.”¹⁰³

A relatively newer way to fight back against eco-unfriendly companies is the creation of watchdog groups. Websites such as CorpWatch and Greenwashing Index give readers and consumers opportunities to recognize companies for their dirty practices. The former gives out “Greenwash Awards” bimonthly based on audience nominations. The Awards are given to the companies that “put more money, time and energy into slick PR campaigns aimed at promoting

¹⁰⁰ Nelson and Peterka, *The New York Times*.

¹⁰¹ Horiuchi, pg. 17.

¹⁰² "History." *Greenpeace*. Greenpeace. <<http://stopgreenwash.org/history>>.

¹⁰³ Dahl, p. A250.

their eco-friendly images, than they do to actually protecting the environment.”¹⁰⁴ The latter allows bloggers to submit and vote on greenwash offenders and environmentally-friendly products and ads (some of the worst-rated ads came from places such as Coca-Cola, Fiji Water, and General Electrics).¹⁰⁵ These movements have made an impact on the American community, according to Claudette Juska from Greenpeace. Juska said, “There’s been a lot of analysis of greenwashing, and the public has caught on to it.”¹⁰⁶

WHAT CONSUMERS NEED TO LOOK OUT FOR

With the help of different organizations, along with companies themselves hinting towards their own wrong-doings, consumers can now decipher whether companies are trying to greenwash them from initial contact with a product or advertisement. Corporations use many tactics to make their greenwash evident, but the majority of people aren’t even aware that the products are guilty of manipulation. If more customers knew the tricks of the corporate trade, the increase in awareness would put a stop to greenwashing.

In an effort to pinpoint the ways in which companies greenwash their customers, TerraChoice Environmental Marketing created the Seven Sins of Greenwashing. In order to decode how businesses greenwash, the organization researched the answers to the following questions:

- Is the claim truthful?
- Does the company offer validation for its claim from an independent and trusted third party?
- Is the claim specific, using terms that have agreed-upon definitions, not vague ones like "natural" or "nontoxic"?
- Is the claim relevant to the product it accompanies?

¹⁰⁴ "CorpWatch: Greenwash Awards." *CorpWatch*. 2010. <<http://www.corpwatch.org/section.php?id=102>>.

¹⁰⁵ Baker and Diffenderfer, p. 25.

¹⁰⁶ Dahl, p. A250.

- Does the claim address the product's principal environmental impact(s) or does it distract consumers from the product's real problems?¹⁰⁷

Based on the conclusions they found from their survey, TerraChoice discovered the seven most common patterns of greenwashing, which are:

1. **Hidden trade-offs:** Committed by suggesting a product is “green” based on an unreasonably narrow set of attributes without attention to other important environmental issues.
2. **No proof of their environmental claims**
3. **Vagueness of claims**
4. **Irrelevance:** Committed by making an environmental claim that may be truthful but is unimportant or unhelpful for consumers seeking environmentally preferable products.
5. **Lesser of Two Evils:** Committed by...distracting the consumer from the greater environmental impacts of the category as a whole
6. **Fibbing:** Committed by making environmental claims that are simply false.
7. **Worshipping false labels**¹⁰⁸

John Grant also notes that there are other ways to spot greenwashing in products, labels and advertisements. This includes using words with no clear meaning (i.e. carbon neutral, GM-free, energy efficient, free range, sweatshop-free, and FSC-certified¹⁰⁹), “green” products coming from a dirty company, suggestive pictures and declaration from the company saying that they are slightly greener from the rest.¹¹⁰

Eco-Labeling

Out of the seven sins, the one that throws off consumers the most is the use of false eco-labeling. ‘Eco-friendly’ labels started appearing on personal care products in the 1980s during the newfound concerns of CFCs depleting the ozone layer.¹¹¹ Nowadays, there are

¹⁰⁷ Makower, Joel. "The Seven Sins of Greenwashing: Is Everybody Lying?" *GreenBiz.com*. GreenBiz Group, 15 Apr. 2009. <<http://www.greenbiz.com/blog/2009/04/15/seven-sins-greenwashing-everybody-lying>>.

¹⁰⁸ TerraChoice, pg. 10.

¹⁰⁹ Grant, pg. 111-112.

¹¹⁰ Horiuchi, pg. 7.

¹¹¹ Grant, pg. 112.

currently more than 500 green labels in the United States.¹¹² Out of those labels, 32 percent of “green” products carried a fake label in 2010.¹¹³

There are certain traits that eco-labels should have in order to be deemed reliable. According to Consumer Reports magazine, there are a few ways to decipher good eco-labels from bad. The best eco-labels not only meet a meaningful set of standards, but also symbolize making improvements in the environment and/or society. Some of the noted criteria include:

- Eco-labels should have a set of environmentally meaningful standards...that should be verifiable
- An eco-label used on one product should have the same meaning if used on other products...and should be written in a way that can be verified in a consistent manner.
- The organization behind an eco-label should make information about organizational structure, funding, board of directors and certification standards available to the public.
- Organizations establishing standards and deciding who can use a logo should not have any ties to, and should not receive any funding from the sale of certified products or contributions from logo users beyond fees for certification.¹¹⁴

Improvements are currently being made to give eco-friendly labels more credibility. Energy Star, which has had its share of scrutiny from environmentalists, is leading the way in improving their label and image. Created in 1992 by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) and the U.S. Department of Energy (DOE), the label was made to be a symbol of an honest, eco-friendly product. However, director of the Government Accountability Office (GAO) in Dallas, Jonathan Meyer, declared Energy Star as a “self-certification by the manufacturer, which leaves it vulnerable to fraud abuse by unscrupulous companies.”¹¹⁵ After a brutal investigation carried out by the GAO, where 15 bogus products and firms were uncovered, the

¹¹² Dahl, pg. A248.

¹¹³ TerraChoice, pg. 20.

¹¹⁴ "What Makes a Good Eco-Label?" *Greener Choices*. Consumer Reports, Jan. 2011.
<<http://www.greenerchoices.org/eco-labels/eco-good.cfm>>.

¹¹⁵ Dahl, pg. A252.

EPA and DOE issued a joint statement promising to strengthen the Energy Star program.¹¹⁶

Those involved with the investigation also said that the report would be “a wake-up call to whip [the program] into shape.”¹¹⁷ As a whole, many believe that eco-labeling could use some retouching to make the environmental marker more credible. Vice President of TerraChoice, Scott Case, states one such solution, proposing that the EPA could handle tweaking environmental labels and combine several existing environmental labels under a single brand to make it easier for customers to identify more environmentally friendly products and goods.¹¹⁸

Education

Consumers also need to search for ways to educate themselves in trustworthy green alternatives if they truly want to be the best shoppers they can be. Unfortunately, there is a lack of resources for the proper kind of education, because the most funding for educating consumers comes from big businesses that are known for greenwashing.

One such company that has a biased view of teaching environmental values is Proctor and Gamble, whose products are full of environmentally-unfriendly materials and chemicals. The company’s “Future Friendly” campaign aims “to reduce our own environmental impact by working with our employees, business partners and established experts to minimize our energy, waste and water use.”¹¹⁹ They even claim to have reduced their energy use 40 percent since the launch of the campaign in 2002.¹²⁰ Proctor and Gamble, unfortunately, does not speak of their high use of palm oil in their Future Friendly campaign. Palm oil is being used as “oil

¹¹⁶ Jones, Enesta, and Jen Stutsman. *EPA, DOE Announce New Steps to Strengthen Energy Star*. Washington: United States Environmental Protection Agency, 19 Mar. 2010.

¹¹⁷ Wald, Matthew L. "Audit Finds Vulnerability of EnergyStar Program." *The New York Times* 25 Mar. 2010: *The New York Times*. <<http://www.nytimes.com/2010/03/26/science/earth/26star.html>>.

¹¹⁸ Dahl, pg. A252.

¹¹⁹ "Future Friendly FAQs." *Proctor & Gamble*. 2011. <<http://www.futurefriendly.com/Pages/Faq.aspx>>.

¹²⁰ *Proctor & Gamble*.

derivatives in laundry detergents and touted a big contract for Indonesian palm oil in 2006.”¹²¹

Retrieving this coveted oil does major destruction to the environment, especially when it comes to rainforests. Building palm oil plantations in rainforests causes deforestation, which is linked to 80 percent of Indonesia’s carbon emissions and destroys habitats for highly endangered animals such as Sumatran tigers and elephants.¹²²

WHAT CORPORATIONS ARE DOING

Companies are starting to become aware that falsely proclaiming pro-environmentalism is tarnishing their image and the trust of their consumers. With the increase of challenges about the truth and accuracy of green and environmental marketing, corporations are finding alternative ways to promote their items and products.

Successful clean corporations incorporate effective green marketing with the use of programs set to improve the framework of the environmental aspects of the company. The Environmental Management System (EMS), “a set of processes and practices that enable an organization to reduce its environmental impacts and increase its operating efficiency,”¹²³ help big businesses plan, implement, monitor, and act to make positive changes to meet their environmental goals. When an EMS is actually in place, companies “have a greater expectation that they actually do know what their environmental results are.”¹²⁴ Meanwhile, taking part in the Global Reporting Initiative (GRI) means that organizations can report and measure their economic, environmental and social performance against other corporations. The sustainability

¹²¹ Neff, Jack. "For Unilever, P&G, No Good Deed Is Going Unpunished." *Advertising Educational Foundation*. 5 May 2008. <<http://www.aef.com/industry/news/data/2008/8017>>.

¹²² "Problem with Palm Oil Factsheet." *Rainforest Action Network*. Rainforest Action Network, 2010. <<http://ran.org/content/problem-palm-oil-factsheet>>.

¹²³ "Basic Information - Environmental Management Systems." *United States Environmental Protection Agency*. United States Environmental Protection Agency. <<http://www.epa.gov/ems/info/index.htm>>.

¹²⁴ Dahl, pg. A250.

reports based on the framework of the network-based organization, launched in 1997, “can be used to demonstrate organizational commitment to sustainable development, to compare organizational performance over time, and to measure organizational performance with respect to laws, norms, standards and voluntary initiatives.”¹²⁵ As a result of being involved with the GRI, corporations are provided with “good green credibility at the company level.”¹²⁶

Meanwhile, already-reputable clean corporations are making their reputation better by learning to keep their mouths shut. The rationale that companies claim for remaining mum is, “If you’re clean and people already think you’re a green company, you don’t need to bother touting it so much-and if touting it puts you at risk of being attacked, just shut up and let people think you’re clean.”¹²⁷ Thanks to excessive consumer scrutiny, companies get better with experience. A mature company is more likely to be truthful with their environmental labeling. The frequency of sin-free labels in established corporations is 28.8 percent, compared to 13.8 percent sin-free labels in immature companies.¹²⁸

CONCLUSION

Even though greenwashing is still a major problem, the proportion of sin-free products and advertising is slowly on the rise. According to TerraChoice, “the number of sin-free products appears to have doubled in each of the last two years, from approximately 1 percent in 2007 to less than 2 percent in 2009, and to almost 4.5 percent in 2010.”¹²⁹ While the

¹²⁵ “What is GRI?” *Global Reporting Initiative*. Tata Consultancy Services, 2007.
<<http://www.globalreporting.org/AboutGRI/WhatIsGRI/>>.

¹²⁶ Dahl, pg. A252.

¹²⁷ Dahl, pg. A250.

¹²⁸ TerraChoice, pg. 18.

¹²⁹ TerraChoice, pg. 16.

percentages seem miniscule, the rapid growth is statistically significant for the fight against greenwashing.

While green products are filling up store shelves, it's clear that smaller companies sell more sin-free products than their big corporation counterparts because the consumers trust the independent brands more. According to a New York Times article, "The market share of the independent brands...is starting to increase relative to the shares of traditional brands' green products in categories where they compete."¹³⁰ Sales of environmentally-friendly independent brands such as [cleaning-product-centric] Seventh Generation [personal care products] Method had double-digit growth in 2010.¹³¹ Environmental blog Treehugger chimes in on the upwards trend of independent green products, stating, "Maybe the real story is that greenwashing efforts are failing, while legitimate efforts to go green are faring well—*despite* the recession?"¹³² Case in point, Clorox's Green Works, whose bleach was discovered to be a registered pesticide,¹³³ made consumers skeptical when they teamed up with grassroots environmental organization Sierra Club. Green, Inc. author Christine MacDonnell commented on the sketchy endorsement deal, stating:

Sierra Club, for instance, didn't do any testing to find out Clorox's line of environmentally-friendly household cleaners are better than other products on the market before agreeing to Clorox's offer. The fact that the Sierra Club is receiving an undisclosed amount of money for lending out its logo has cause controversy inside the organization. Watchdogs such as the

¹³⁰ Clifford, Stephanie, and Andrew Martin. "As Consumers Cut Spending, 'Green' Products Lose Allure." *The New York Times* 21 Apr. 2011: *The New York Times*. <<http://www.nytimes.com/2011/04/22/business/energy-environment/22green.html?pagewanted=2&r=1>>.

¹³¹ Clifford, *The New York Times*.

¹³² Chernansky, Rachel. "NY Times Says Green Sales Are Down, But Misses the Real Point." *Treehugger*. Discovery Communications, LLC, 22 Apr. 2011. <<http://www.treehugger.com/files/2011/04/ny-times-says-green-sales-down-but-misses-real-point.php>>.

¹³³ Siegelbaum, Heidi. "The dubious road to Clorox's new GreenWorks product line." *American Public Media*. 21 Jan. 2008. <http://www.publicradio.org/columns/sustainability/greenwash/2008/01/the_dubious_road_to_cloroxs_ne.html>.

Consumers Union have charged Sierra Club with conflict of interest.¹³⁴

As a result, sales of Greenworks products have fallen to about \$60 million in 2010 (down from \$100 million in 2008) and advertising for the products nosedived to \$1.4 million in 2010 (from more than \$25 million in 2009).¹³⁵

With more smaller, more honest companies defeating bigger corporations, thanks to the activism of government organizations, watchdog groups and more consumers seeing choosing brands they can trust, greenwashing is slowly faltering. However, there is still a long way to go before the dirty practice is completely annihilated from the mainstream. If more precautions are taken to ensure sin-free advertising, marketing, promoting and products, the act of greenwashing will be washed away for good in the coming years.

¹³⁴ MacDonnell, Christine. "In Green Inc., Christine MacDonald Explores Seamy Underside of Green Non-Profit World." Interview by Jeremy Elton Jacquot. *Treenugger*. Discovery Communications, LLC, 10 Oct. 2008. <<http://www.treehugger.com/files/2008/10/green-inc-book.php>>.

¹³⁵ Clifford, *The New York Times*.