



GC³ Green Chemistry &
Commerce Council

Compilation of Terms Marketing Green Products: A “Green” Glossary

Version 1.0

November, 2010

There is no one organization that officially defines terms used in the marketing and sale of green products. Instead, there are a multitude of organizations ranging from government to industry to independent certifiers, to nonprofit organizations. This leaves consumers confused by what are often unwarranted or overblown claims of sustainability or environmental friendliness, a phenomenon known as greenwashing. Innovators and leaders in the production of sustainable products also struggle with greenwashing as they try to differentiate their products in the marketplace. In the absence of definitions of “green” or current guidelines for words and terms used to market and sell green products, product manufacturers making safer, more environmentally sustainable products have few tools to identify their products from others.

The US Federal Trade Commission (FTC) has attempted to establish baseline environmental marketing criteria with its "Guides for the Use of Environmental Marketing Claims," known as the "Green Guides;" but the latest update of these guides was published in 1998, with a 2009 update still to be released. There is currently a rising tide of legal and regulatory actions aimed at products pitched as "environmentally friendly," as consumers and the FTC have begun challenging whether such claims live up to their billing¹.

In an effort to gain some clarity about the definitions of terms commonly used to market and sell “green” products, the Green Chemistry and Commerce Council (GC3), a business to business network of firms across sectors dedicated to advancing safer chemicals and products has developed a “Green Glossary.” Terms that are commonly used to market and sell green products were researched and a number of these were selected for inclusion in Version One of the Glossary. Initially, definitions of terms were gathered from various sources including government, industry, certifiers, and the nonprofit sector. The variety of definitions for single terms, none of which is “official” highlights the challenge that has made greenwashing so prevalent. For Version One of the Green Glossary we have included definitions most likely to be used and respected by companies trying to differentiate their products as safer. The definitions included are for the most part from either government or highly regarded non-profits.

The Glossary provides a definition or definitions of a term, the source of the definition - government, guideline, standard, label, industry, government, NGO - as well as a website, notes, and opportunities for misuse. The opportunities for misuse often illustrate the limitations of the definition.

¹ O’Connell, Vanessa. “Green” Goods, Red Flags: Rash of Earth-Friendly Claims Spurs Rising Number of Lawsuits and FTC Actions,” *The Wall Street Journal*, April 24, 2010, under “Business”
<http://online.wsj.com/article/SB10001424052702304506904575180210758367310.html> (accessed September 14, 2010).

This glossary is a first version, aimed at helping manufacturers, retailers and consumers begin to understand the complexity of marketing and selling green products. As the Green Glossary is a work in progress, input is encouraged. Please contact Yve Torrie at the Lowell Center for Sustainable Production (Yve_Torrie@uml.edu) with information on new terms or other comments.