

Deciphering green cleaning products from murky marketing

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31 Oct 2013

Every product produced in the world today leaves a mark on the environment. This is known as its ecological footprint. This footprint starts design and continues through to disposal.



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Green cleaning involves the use of cleaning methods and products with environmentally friendly ingredients. The techniques and products utilised generally avoid the use of chemically reactive and toxic cleaning products which contain various toxic chemicals, some of which emit volatile organic compounds (VOCs). These VOCs cause respiratory and dermatological issues. The manner in which residential and industrial cleaning products are manufactured, packaged and distributed are important elements in the green cleaning supply chain. These products are ideally designed to preserve human health and to safeguard the environment.

Gaining a competitive advantage

While the altruistic purposes for manufacturing and/or utilising green cleaning products should be the primary reason why these products are created and used, it is possible to gain a competitive advantage through the marketing of green cleaning practices. The question as to why companies should market the fact that they are green often arises, with purists believing that environmentally friendly practices should not be done for recognition.

Perhaps the marketing of green practices has received criticism due to the fact that campaigns possibly allude to environmentally friendly practices where these do not truly form part of that business' ethos. Some steps have been taken to prevent this and the legal implications of marketing claims call for caution. With the application of the Consumer Protection Act, misleading or overstated claims are not permissible.

However, what is important to remember is that retailers and consumers have the right to be fully informed about what the products they are purchasing contain, and how these products will affect them, their families and their environment. Therefore, the marketing of green products allows consumers to choose the best products, according to their needs and with full information available to them.

Keywords to look out for

Due to the fact that marketing and labelling can be misleading, it is important for consumers to know what to look for when purchasing green cleaning products. When trying to determine which product is "greenest", certain keywords will point consumers in the right direction. These include; phosphate free, nitrogen free, readily biodegradable, non-toxic, minimises exposure to concentrates, reduced bioconcentration or bioaccumulation factor, reduced or no added dyes (except when added for safety purposes), reduced or no skin irritants and reduced or no VOCs. The label of green cleaning products that utilise biological active ingredients should express the CFU value as 10x.

To be truly green, these products should be usable in cold or warm water to conserve energy and should make use of renewable energy resources, such as biobased solvents from citrus, seed, vegetable and pine oils. While not all of these attributes will be present in each product, it is a good starting point to look for these key phrases to ensure what is being purchased is legitimately green.

As many traditional retailers have begun stocking green cleaning products, it is easy to jump on the green bandwagon, but not so easy to identify which products are designed with the overriding goal of reducing their ecological footprint in mind. It can be difficult to identify whether undesirable ingredients are present in some cleaning products. The best way to avoid these substances is to purchase green cleaning products from a company that started with true sustainability in mind.

ABOUT DONAVIN PATRICK HAWKER

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