



What is a Green Product: 7 Ways to Define Green

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The Federal Trade Commission (FTC) recently announced it would begin cracking down on companies engaged in unsubstantiated "green" claims.

While acknowledging that most companies do not purposefully stretch the truth when marketing their products' or services' sustainability, the FTC is concerned that with a plethora of "green" labels flooding the market (a recent study identified 146 environment-related labels in use in the U.S.), the buying public is confused and potentially misinformed.

The essence of the problem centers on the fact that there are many perceptions of what "green" really means.

What Does "Green" Really Mean?

For the purposes of this article, we define "green" in the context of sustainability.

From a business standpoint, a commitment to sustainability means explicitly taking into account the environmental and social impacts of business operations and taking action to eliminate all negative environmental, social and economic impacts of operations.

To protect ourselves against "green washing," or the use of questionable green claims, we should educate ourselves first, as there are many different aspects of sustainability.

For instance, in the LEED green building rating system, the concept of sustainability is broken down into five core areas:

- Sustainable sites
- Water efficiency
- Energy and atmosphere
- Materials and resources
- Indoor environmental quality

Tips for Recognizing a Green Product

Here are some easy tips to help you identify products that are better for the environment:

GreenSeal - Look for products that are Green Seal certified. To earn the Green Seal, a product must meet strong environmental standards as demonstrated by rigorous evaluations and testing. Various cleaning and paper products are Green Seal certified.

Biodegradable Products Institute - Compostable certification means that products meet ASTM International standards for biodegradability when composted.

Chlorine Free - Select products that are chlorine free. Products that are manufactured and brightened without chlorine or chlorine byproducts are better for the environment.

EPA DfE Program - Use commercial cleaning and maintenance products that the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency DfE program has identified as having improved environmental and human health characteristics.

EcoLogo - Shop by logo, or the EcoLogo that is! The EcoLogo sets standards and certifies that products are environmentally preferable across the entire product life cycle.

FSC Certified - Look for the Forest Stewardship Council (FSC) certification. This nonprofit organization is devoted to the responsible management of the world's forests. The FSC logo indicates that wood products have come from responsibly managed forests.

Recyclable - Possibly the most recognized sign of an environmentally preferable product is the recyclable sign that designates a product or its package can be recycled.

There are many other resources available, which can provide in-depth information, including:

- USGBC: [United States Green Building Council](#)

- UL Laboratories: [UL Environment](#)

- LinkedIn has numerous green groups that may be helpful.

- Staples Advantage has a new Green Guide and environmental [website](#)

These resources are just the tip of the iceberg. For better or worse, we must continue to educate ourselves because we all individually and collectively define green.

To better define "green" for ourselves, our businesses and our communities, we need to become more active in our education and how we implement these initiatives. We need to get involved in our communities and our places of work and advocate the changes we wish to make to drive further sustainability.

Involvement could be as simple as the following six things:

- 1) Requiring more recycled content in the items we purchase;
- 2) Discontinuing the use of disposable water bottles;
- 3) Using certified green cleaning products;
- 4) Adopting a green cleaning policy;

- 5) Reducing/eliminating the items we print;
- 6) Installing solar-powered motion sensor lighting that only turns on when needed.

Our collective involvement is important as we all play a critical role in shaping the attributes of the sustainability movement.