

Confusion surrounds eco-friendly claims by manufacturers

By Sandy Bauers, Philadelphia Inquirer

The grocery store can be so confusing. I'd like to buy greener products, but it's hard to figure which they are.

Is it the "all natural," "entirely natural," or "100% natural" food? Poison ivy and salmonella are natural, too.

Is it the "biodegradable" cleaning wipes? The dish soap that proclaims the company "helps save wildlife"? Or the cleaner with three logos: Sierra Club, "Natural Products Association Certified," and the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency's "Design for the Environment"?

The bad news is that there is no simple, universally recognized label akin to, say, the UL symbol for electrical products that meet safety standards set by Underwriters Laboratories (which, it so happens, recently jumped into the crowded green field with a subsidiary called UL Environment).

The good news is that James Kohm feels my pain.

Starting about 2005, there's been "a tsunami of green claims coming into the marketplace," he said.

Kohm is an enforcement director at the Federal Trade Commission, an agency that is trying to sort all this out.

To be sure, consumers want safer, and greener, products. So marketers are responding. Products are labeled recycled, recyclable, ozone-friendly, nontoxic, and more.

Labels and certifications wear your politics on their sleeves.

A few months ago, the U.S. Department of Agriculture introduced its “BioPreferred” label for products whose ingredients are at least one-quarter renewable plant, animal, marine, or forestry materials.

Looking for products that are manufactured using wind energy? A consortium of companies and groups now has a “WindMade” label.

Bill Daddi has counted 350 green seals – including the one he represents, the Green Seal.

Read the whole story