DOLLARS & Sense
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The New Language of "Green"

Want to buy products that are good for the environment? Many companies are betting that you do, and they're making claims and designing packages to promote the "green" attributes of their products. While some products that claim to be better for the environment live up to their claims, others don't. When you see "environmentally friendly", "ecosafe," or "better for the environment" on a package, it sounds good, but the manufacturer may not be delivering on their promise. When you see these words, look for an explanation of why the manufacturer is making the claim. Understanding terms like "recyclable," "biodegradable," and "ozone friendly" can help you make better buying decisions and protect the environment

Here are a few definitions to look for:

Recyclable: A company can say a product is recyclable or can use the universal recycling symbol if most people who buy it can recycle it. But that doesn't mean you'll be able to recycle it where you live. You will want to check with your city or county government to see if this service is available. A recyclable product is a good choice for the environment if your community offers a recycling program for materials such as plastic, glass, paper, cardboard, and ink cartridges.

Recycled: Recycled products are at least partly made of materials that have been used once and are now being put to use again. A product that claims to be recycled must tell you how much of it is recycled unless the product or package is made of 100% recycled materials. If it is 100% recycled, the manufacturer will probably tell you that in very big letters. Look for words like 30% recycled, 20% recycled, etc.

Preconsumer recycled: A product that says it's recycled from "pre-consumer" material is usually made of scraps from the factory. For example, a company that makes cardboard boxes and saves the leftover scraps to make other paper goods, e.g., toilet rolls, can say their products are pre-consumer recycled.

Postconsumer recycled: A product that says it's made from postconsumer recycled material must be made from previously used products like newspapers, plastic bottles, glass containers, or aluminum cans, i.e., postconsumer claims require that the product be made from materials that have already been used by consumers and have been collected and returned to be used again.

Biodegradable and Photodegradable: These materials will break down

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What Does "Green" Really Mean?

Are all those items on the store shelves that claim to be eco-friendly really helping the environment? Just what are the benefits of recycling? What are all those light bulbs everyone keeps talking about? In this newsletter, FFEF has gathered some information that can help you understand the new ways products are labeled.

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into natural components when they are exposed to air or moisture. Detergents, shampoos, and other cleaning materials that are biodegradable will break down in wastewater systems without causing harm to the environment. Photodegradable materials will break down after they have been exposed to enough sunlight. The breakdown of all of these materials happens very slowly, usually in landfills, and can take decades because they are usually buried under mounds and mounds of other garbage.

Compostable: Material that will degrade in a way that enriches the soil and returns nutrients to the earth is called compostable. Yard trimmings, food scraps, leaves, grass, and other yard waste are the types of materials that are often collected for composting. When you see "compostable" on a product or package, it means you can add the product to your backyard compost pile when you are through with it. If you don't have a composting pile of your own, you can probably find a municipal composting facility in your area.

CFC-free or Ozone Friendly: All ozone is not alike. The ozone layer in the upper atmosphere is necessary to prevent the sun's harmful radiation from reaching the earth, but when ozone develops at ground level, it forms smog. If a product claims to be "ozone friendly" or "ozone safe," it should mean that the products do not harm the atmosphere, either the upper ozone layer or the air at the ground level.

Chlorofluorocarbons (CFCs): These chemical substances are believed to deplete the earth's protective ozone layer in the upper atmosphere. In 1978, CFCs, which had been widely used as propellants in spray products, were banned from use in nearly all consumer aerosol products. They will eventually be phased out in all products and manufacturing processes.

Federal Trade Commission Guidelines

The Federal Trade Commission knows that some manufacturers use "green" labels to persuade consumers to buy their products. Vague or general claims that sound warm and fuzzy generally offer little information of value. Terms like "environmentally friendly," "environmentally safe," "environmentally preferable," or "eco-safe" or labels that contain images like a picture of the globe with the words "Earth Smart" around it are unhelpful for two reasons:

- First, all products, packaging and services have some environmental impact, although some may have less than others.
- Second, these phrases alone do not provide the specific information you need to compare products, packaging, or services on their environmental merits.

Look for claims that give information with substance and that explain why the product is environmentally friendly or has earned a special seal. Following are some of the guidelines set by the FTC:

- A product or package can only be marketed as "recyclable' if it can be separated and collected from household and commercial trash for reuse, or to make another product or package, through an established recycling program.
- Product labels that say "Please Recycle" are relevant only if your community collects the products for recycling—and meaningless if it doesn't. Contact your city or county government to find out about curbside pick-up or drop-off alternatives for recycling plastic, glass, metal, and newspapers and other paper products.
- Recycled products may have been made from materials that are used, reconditioned or remanufactured. If a product is labeled recycled because it contains used, reconditioned or remanufactured parts, the label also must say the product is "used," "reconditioned" or "remanufactured."

The FTC has issued Guides for the Use of Environmental Marketing Claims ("Green Guides") to prevent the false or misleading use of environmental terms in product advertising and marketing and reduce consumer confusion. For a copy of the Green Guides, contact: FTC Consumer Response Center, 600 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW Washington, DC 20580; 202-FTC-HELP (382-4357); 1-866-653-4261 (TDD for the hearing impaired). ■

See What Others Are Doing

Some citizens have found solutions to the needs of those around them by recycling. Visit these websites to see some of their innovative ideas.

Go Green: Gogreen.org

Worldwatch Institute: Worldwatch.org/resources/go_green_save_green

Creative Reuse Warehouse www.resourcecenterchicago.org

Alameda County Waste Management Authority Source Reduction & Recycling Board www.stopwaste.org

City of Tucson/Pima County Household Hazardous Waste Program: www.deq.co.pima.az.us/waste/househol.htm

Saving Energy and Money with Light Bulbs

Energy efficient lighting is good for the environment and can save you money. Light bulb manufacturers are required to provide the necessary information to help you choose the most energy-efficient bulb. Following is the information that should be printed on each light bulb package.

***Light output:** How much light the bulb produces, measured in lumens. A 60-watt regular incandescent bulb yields about 855 lumens. A 15-watt compact fluorescent bulb yields about 900 lumens.

***Energy usage:** The total electrical power a bulb uses, measured in watts.

***Voltage:** If a bulb is not 120 volts, the voltage must appear on the label. Most bulbs are 120 volts. Light output and efficiency decrease when you use a bulb with voltage that is different from the voltage you use in your house. Most places in the United States operate on a 120-volt system.

***Average life in hours:** How long the bulb will last.

***Number of bulbs:** How many bulbs are in the package.

There are now many types of bulbs to choose from. The following descriptions can help you choose the best cost-saving light bulbs for your home.

Regular incandescent bulbs: These are the pear-shaped bulbs with a screw-in base that have been around for many years. They use electricity to heat a filament until it glows hot enough to produce light. About 90% of the electricity used by these bulbs is lost as heat. These bulbs typically burn for about three hours a day for a year before they burn out.

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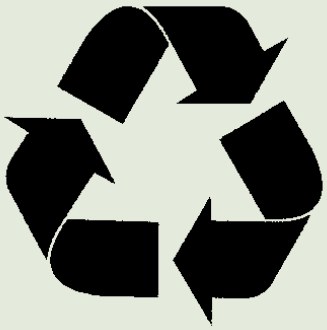
Green Symbols



Symbols that are used universally to represent recycling information can make it easy for you to tell you whether a product or package is recyclable or if it's made from recycled materials.

You have probably seen this symbol. It means that a product or package is either made of recycled materials or that the product or package is recyclable or both. The manufacturer should say which one is true if both terms do not apply.

This symbol was developed by the Society of the Plastics Industry and indicates the type of plastic in a product. The plastics are ranged from 1 to 7. Plastics coded 1 and 2, such as soda bottles, detergent and shampoo containers, and milk jugs, are the most likely to be accepted for recycling. See what plastic codes are accepted at your local recycling facility before you recycle.

Plastic Recycling Symbols

#1 PETE—Soft drink, juice, water, detergent, and cleaner bottles.

#2 HDPE—Milk/water jugs, plastic bags, butter tubs, detergent, shampoo, bleach and motor oil bottles.

#3 PVC—Window cleaner, cooking oils, detergent bottles, peanutbutter jars, water jugs

#4 LDPE—Grocery bags, dry cleaning bags, flexible film packaging, some bottles

#5 PP—Caps, disks, syrup bottles, yogurt tubs, straws, film packaging

#6 PS—meat trays, egg cartons, plates, cutlery, carry-out containers, clear trays

#7 Other—resins not mentioned above, or combination plastics

ARTICLES

TIPS & TRICKS

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Compact fluorescent bulbs: With just one-fourth of the energy, these bulbs produce as much light as regular incandescent bulbs. In other words, a 15-watt compact fluorescent bulb gives out the same amount of light as a 60-watt incandescent bulb. These bulbs also last about ten times as long as incandescent bulbs.

This is good to keep in mind when you are shopping and comparing prices. Remember that the compact fluorescent will last ten times as long. Multiply the price of the regular incandescent bulb by ten to get a true comparison.

Incandescent spotlights and floodlights: These bulbs are mostly used in recessed ceiling fixtures or in outdoor fixtures. A special coating helps to direct and focus the light in the right area. These bulbs burn for about 2,000 hours or twice as long as regular incandescent bulbs.

Halogen bulbs: These bulbs contain a small capsule filled with halogen gas which emits a bright white light. While standard halogen bulbs use less energy and last longer than regular incandescent bulbs, the Department of Energy (DOE) has cautioned that the type of halogen bulbs frequently used in floor lamps can generate excessive heat, creating a fire hazard. This type of halogen bulb also uses significant amounts of energy. The DOE recommends using compact fluorescent lamp bulbs instead.

General service fluorescent bulbs: These thin, long tubes are often used in kitchens, offices, garages, and basements. They are more energy efficient than incandescent bulbs and don't produce heat. These bulbs last 10 to 20 times longer than incandescent bulbs.

Benefits of Recycling:

- Reduces the amount of waste sent to landfills and incinerators
- Conserves natural resources such as timber, water, and minerals
- Prevents Pollution caused by reducing the need to collect new raw materials
- Saves energy
- Reduces greenhouse gas emissions that contribute to global climate change
- Helps sustain the environment for future generations
- Creates new jobs in the recycling and manufacturing industries

When deciding what type of light bulb best suits your needs, keep in mind that highly efficient compact fluorescent bulbs may cost more than regular incandescent bulbs, but their efficient use of electricity and long operating life will offset the cost.

Suppose the table lamp in your living room is turned on for 1,000 hours a year and your electric company charges 8¢ per kilowatt hour. A regular incandescent 60-watt bulb will cost less to buy, but will need to be replaced at least once a year. Compare that to a 15-watt compact fluorescent bulb, which may cost you $10, but may last you as long as 10 years. In addition, the compact fluorescent bulb costs only about $1.20 a year to operate because of its low wattage, while the standard bulb costs about $4.80.

For more information about energy-saving products for your home, visit the Department of Energy's Energy Efficiency and Renewable Energy Network website at www.energysavers.gov ■

Find more great money saving ideas on our web site, FFEF.org

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If you know of someone who would benefit from this information, please pass this newsletter along.