



Spotlight on Green Seal & EcoLogo: Labeling Safe, Green Products

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In an ideal world, all cleaning products would be safe – both for people and for the planet, says Scot Case, vice-president of EcoLogo. But until that ideal becomes a reality, organizations such as EcoLogo help consumers identify the safest, most environmentally preferable products.

The organization researches the safety of products based on a variety of factors, including chemical composition and how the product is manufactured, and then places its seal on the top 20 percent of the safest products available, Case explained.

“All of our standards are transparent and open to the public,” says Case, “so that the public knows exactly what the product had to do in order to earn our label.”

EcoLogo, originally formed in 1988 by the Canadian government, is now managed by TerraChoice, an environmental marketing firm dedicated to promoting safer, greener products that meet its science-based criteria. EcoLogo’s seal has a presence in Europe and Asia as well as Canada.

In the U.S., it’s similar in design and mission to Green Seal, an independent nonprofit

organization founded in 1989 that also labels products. Case says: “Both Green Seal and EcoLogo are Type 1 environmental labels which means they are environmental leadership labels. They focus on multiple issues and standards.”

Mark Petruzzi, Vice President of Certification and Strategic Relations for Green Seal, Inc. describes the need for EcoLogo and Green Seal this way: “We do all the dirty work for you so, as a purchaser, you don’t need to waste your time thinking about the chemical composition of each product. It’s all been distilled down into a seal of approval. It’s like, when you go to the grocery store and are thousands of miles away from the point of production, there’s no way you can look a farmer in the eye and ask if your jug of milk is organic. So you look for the USDA organic seal.”

Petruzzi says that both Green Seal and EcoLogo look at the product’s manufacturing process from start to finish, taking into account factors such as gallons of water used in its production, the qualities of its packaging, and the kilowatts of energy used throughout its journey to the shelf.

“We develop our standards from a rigorous,

scientific perspective,” Petruzzi says. “We send auditors out to where these products are manufactured to make sure companies are doing what they say they’re doing. It’s all without bias – we have no direct ties to the products and services.”

Plus, Petruzzi says, each product is tested for effectiveness so that consumers know they can trust the quality of green cleaning products. One big challenge, Petruzzi says is that “with a lot of schools being required to go green, you’re going to run into janitors and cleaning staff who are not convinced that a green product will work. We think green products darn well better work as well as what they’re already using.”

“Consumer confusion leads to inaction,” Case says. There are other labels on the market, says Case – but they’re not all created equal. Recently he testified in a Congressional hearing about the need for consistency in labeling, and he says that in the future, the U.S. government may need to play a bigger role in regulating labels, or maybe a consortium of retailers could agree on which labels to promote.

In the end, though, Case says: “All labels should be out of business. We wouldn’t be in business if all products were safe for human health and for the environment.”