



Start With Trust®

## **Sorting Out "Green" Advertising Claims:**

The Federal Trade Commission, in cooperation with the EPA, has developed the following guidelines for advertisers to make sure environmental marketing claims don't mislead consumers.

### **Recycled:**

- Unless the product or package contains 100 percent recycled materials, the label must tell you how much is recycled.
- Unless it is obvious to the consumer, the label must explain why the product is classified as recycled, clarifying specifically whether it is because the product contains used, rebuilt, reconditioned, or completely remanufactured parts.
- Recyclable claims on labels and advertising mean the manufacturer or seller of the products has proof that the products can be collected and used again, or made into useful products.

Example: A used auto parts store may sell used automobile parts that have been salvaged from other cars and label them "recycled" without any other description because it's plain that they are used parts. But an office copier that is labeled "recycled" because it was rebuilt, reconditioned or remanufactured must state whether or not the recycled content came from rebuilt, reconditioned or remanufactured parts because it is not likely obvious to the user.

### **Material Reduction:**

- Some products and packages state they use less material than former or competing products or packaging.
- To be meaningful, such claims should say exactly what's been reduced, by how much and compared to what.

Example: "20 percent less waste than our previous package" gives you more information than "20 percent less waste."

### **Vague or General Claims:**

- All products, packaging and services have some environmental impact, although some may have less than others.
- These phrases alone do not provide the specific information you need to compare

products, packaging, or services on their environmental merits.

- A manufacturer must have reason to believe that the products won't pose any significant risk to people or the environment.
- Look for additional information that explains why the product is environmentally friendly or has earned a special seal.

Examples: Non-Toxic, Environmentally Friendly, Environmentally Safe, Eco-Safe, Earth Smart.

### **Degradable:**

- Biodegradable materials, like food and leaves, break down and decompose into elements found in nature when they are exposed to air, moisture, and bacteria or other organisms.
- Photodegradable materials, usually plastics, disintegrate into smaller pieces when exposed to enough sunlight.
- Cleaning products, like detergents and shampoos, often display "biodegradable" claims. Most of these products have always degraded in wastewater systems, causing no harm to the environment.

### **Symbol with chasing arrows:**



Many products display this "universal" recycling symbol. Some companies use it to mean the product or package is made of recycled materials and others use it to mean that the product or package is recyclable. Since some communities don't accept every product or package that bears the symbol, it's a good idea to check with your local recycling or solid waste officials if you are unsure about appropriate disposal.

### **SPI Symbol:**



Manufacturers use the Society of the Plastics Industry (SPI), to indicate the type of plastic from which a particular product is made. SPI code numbers range from 1 to 7. Bottles or jugs labeled with numbers 1 and 2, such as soda bottles, detergent, shampoo, and milk jugs, are the most likely to be accepted for recycling. Not all communities collect and recycle containers with the same codes, so it's a good idea to check with your recycling and solid waste officials for information on the codes that are accepted for recycling in your area.

For more Austin area consumer tips, scams and alerts, read the BBB blog ([Austin.bbb.org/blog](http://Austin.bbb.org/blog)) for the most up-to-date details. If there are specific topics you'd like to get advice on from BBB, please let us know by calling 512-445-2911 or email us at [info@austin.bbb.org](mailto:info@austin.bbb.org).

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