

Greenwashing — I've Been Had

CARRIE ELLIS, Editor, Chem.Info



There aren't many feelings worse than that of being duped, especially if you have an elevated estimation of your own intellectual powers. (I tested at 29 on my ACT exam, I swear.) Most of the time, I like to think that I'm pretty shrewd when it comes to marketing schemes and statistics being twisted by the most keen of spin doctors, distinctly because as an editor — trust me — I've seen it all.

However, in light of all the new greenwashing PR gracing my inbox, the social media, and the trade and popular consumer media at large, I feel as if things are getting greener, albeit the actual environmental benefits are hazier — at times, maybe even pseudo-green. I fell victim to one such case.

Not long ago, I received a hurried voicemail in regard to some research I've been conducting on environmentally friendly plastic and resin alternatives. Turns out, one of the self-professed pro-environmental plastics experts I interviewed not necessarily lied, but rather thrust his products into a rose-colored spectrum of ambiguity and/or ambivalence, using language that would be particularly vexing for someone who's not familiar with the topic at hand. (That'd be me.)

Now, I'm not sure if this greenwashing land mine is true of those just like me — those who are unable to stake a claim on the validity of provided facts given the absence of a scientific background — or the population in general, but either way, it has to stop. As individual/commercial consumers turn to green labeling to make purchasing decisions, this problem escalates in importance. How do we make the best decision when ill-informed?

Thankfully, this particular issue was brought to my attention, but in the future, to whom should I turn? Obviously commercial enterprises are not to be trusted on the merits of their own capabilities, nor their marketing cohorts. Should I just remain appalled by the audacity of those looking to contribute a quote here or there for the

Greenwashing — I've Been Had

Published on Chem.Info (<http://www.chem.info>)

sake of honest journalism when I find &em out? Who knows? But in any case, I should definitely remain suspicious.

Regardless, here's an abbreviated list of reliable sources, which I unearthed in my quest for finding independent or government-sponsored organizations whom you can trust (for the most part, I think) on environmental issues with verifiable information and sources:

- Department of Energy (www.energy.gov [1]).
- Environmental Protection Agency (www.epa.gov [2]).
- [American Society for Testing and Materials](http://www.astm.org) [3](www.astm.org [4]).
- Air & Waste Management Association (www.awma.org [5]).
- Oxo-biodegradable Plastics Association (www.biodeg.org [6]).
- [Institute of Environmental Science & Technology](http://www.iest.org/i4a/pages/index.cfm?pageid=1) [7] (www.iest.org/i4a/pages/index.cfm?pageid=1 [8]).
- Association of Energy Engineers (www.aeecenter.org [9]).
- National Institute of Standards and Technology (www.nist.gov/index.html [10]).

Of course, the only pragmatic way to cool something as hot, as widely varying and as pervasive as false greenwashing is through widespread education from a source that can be safely said to have no vested interests in monetizing that education.

While I'm on this topic, allow me to share that I've gotten some commentary lately that the Chem. Insider Daily hasn't been representative of the processing industry in that our subject lines oft times seem to reek of safety and environmental worst-case scenarios.

Well, amongst other reasons, Chem.Info staff highlights these doomsday features as it's these kind of worst-case scenarios that plant operations managers and engineers need to learn from. According to a song by Mindless Self Indulgence: “Punch your lights out/Hit the pavement/That's what I call entertainment/Causin' problems makes you famous/All the violence makes a statement.”

When applying these lyrics to the processing industry, one could take it to signify that processing plants, amid all of the negative media attention, should not ignore the dark headlines, but embrace them as something to avoid in their own facilities. In other words, in order to circumvent being the butt of safety and environmentally clashing articles like those run in the Chem. Insider Daily, do the research and make the necessary changes.

Am I the only one whose head spins at the greenwashing washing over the processing industry, not to mention other markets that shall remain nameless for now? Has anyone else been had by false, environmentally motivated, holier-than-thou claims? Should media call these companies out? If so, how, where and why?

Tell me what you think, if you have a solution (if you deem one necessary) or if you

Greenwashing — I've Been Had

Published on Chem.Info (<http://www.chem.info>)

have any other recommendations for valid environmental resources via carrie.ellis@advantagemedia.com [11].

Source URL (retrieved on 10/21/2014 - 6:38am):

<http://www.chem.info/blogs/2009/11/greenwashing-%E2%80%94-ive-been-had>

Links:

- [1] <http://www.energy.gov/>
- [2] <http://www.epa.gov/>
- [3] <http://encyclopedia.thefreedictionary.com/American+Society+for+Testing+and+Materials>
- [4] <http://www.astm.org/>
- [5] <http://www.awma.org/>
- [6] <http://www.biodeg.org/>
- [7] <http://www.iest.org/>
- [8] <http://www.iest.org/i4a/pages/index.cfm?pageid=1>
- [9] <http://www.aeecenter.org/>
- [10] <http://www.nist.gov/index.html>
- [11] <mailto:carrie.ellis@advantagemedia.com>