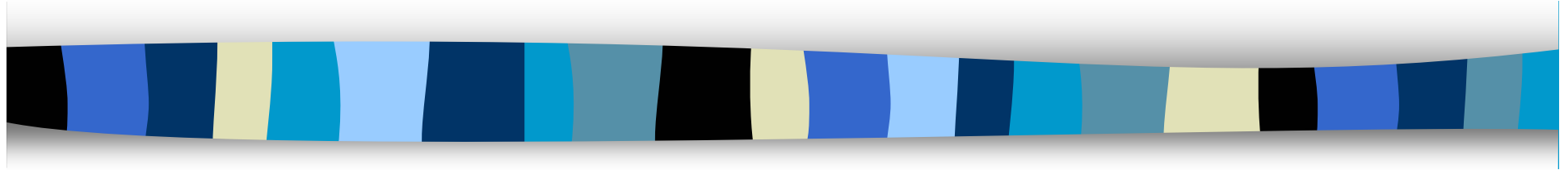


# Myths in Green Products



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# Outline

- What we and others are doing?
- What misunderstandings there may be in green purchasing.



# Environmental Purchasing in the US

- According to Federal Acquisition Regulation, federal agencies are required to:
  - Implement **cost-effective** contracting preference programmes favouring the acquisition of **environmentally preferable** and **energy-efficient** products and services (FAR 23.704(a))



# Environmental Purchasing in the US

- Prepare product **descriptions** to achieve maximum practicable use of **recovered** materials, other materials that are environmentally preferable, and products that are energy-efficient. (FAR 11.101(b))
- US EPA EPP site:  
<http://yosemite.epa.gov/oppt/eppstand2.nsf>



# Hong Kong (1)

- Mentioned in the *Policy Framework for the Management of Municipal solid Waste (2005-2014)* and *2006/ 07 Policy Address*.
- Government's Green Procurement Policy:
  - with improved recyclability, higher recycled content, reduced packaging, greater durability, and greater energy efficiency;
  - Products that utilize clean technology and/or clean fuels;



## Hong Kong (2)

- Products that result in reduced water consumption;
  - Products that emit fewer irritating or toxic substances during installation or use; and
  - Products that result in reduced production of toxic substances, or less toxic substances, upon disposal.
- No mandatory requirements from private sector, therefore leaving much to the goodwill of individual organizations to participate.



# Additional criteria suggested

- Transportation distance,
- Safer manufacturing approaches,
- Fair trading deal,
- Reduced greenhouse gas emissions.



# Buy or not buy?

- Research conducted in developed countries shows that consumers are sceptical about advertizers' environmental claims (Dold, 1991; Manrai et al. 1997; Mohr et al., 1998).
- Why?



# Ambiguities and Pitfalls

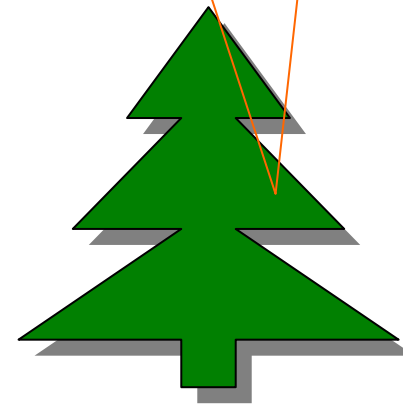
# Part and partial claims (1)

- Real vs. Plastic Christmas Tree

*I am  
carbon  
neutral.*



*I can be reused.*

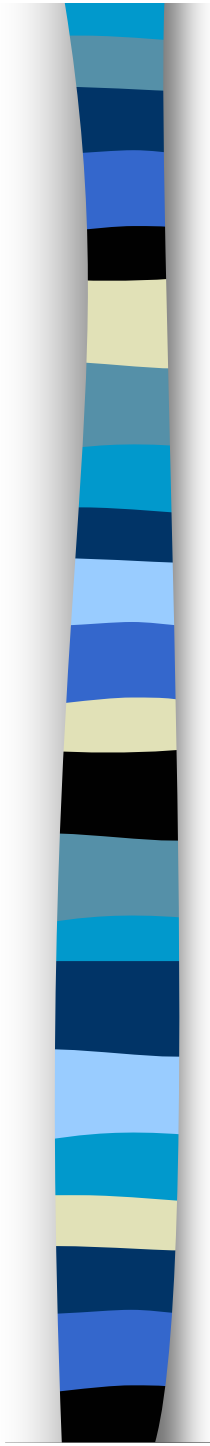


## Part and partial claims (2)

- Suppose Products A & B are close substitutes, how to choose between them?

	Product A	Product B
Energy efficiency	✓	✗
Waste	✗	✓
GHG	✓	✗
Packaging	✗	✓

Life cycle approach



*Mislead consumer by  
suggesting a product is green  
based upon a single  
environmental attribute.*

# It's 100% recyclable! = Green?

- Many materials are technically recyclable but not necessarily economically viable to be recycled.
- E.g. liquid paper board & pharmaceutical blisters





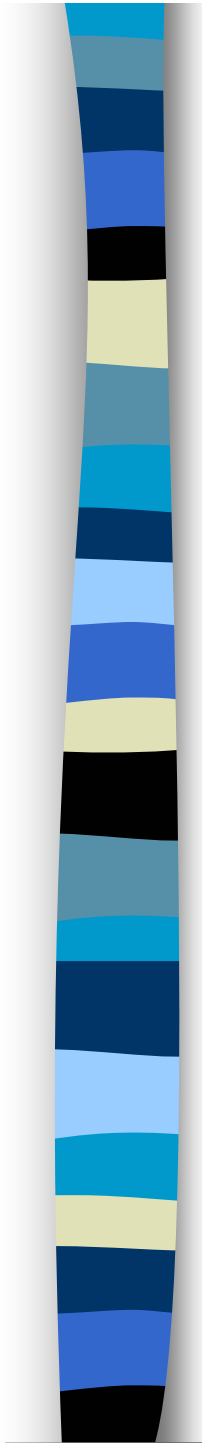
# 100% recycled = Green? (1)

- This should be taken to mean that the product is made with only secondary materials.
- Post-consumer and pre-consumer waste.
- Many products, especially paper and plastic plastics are traditionally made with 100% pre-consumer waste not for the environment but because it saves cost to do so.



## 100% recycled = Green? (2)

- Also, except for glass and metal, material performance will deteriorate when undergoing recycling process.
- Not sustainable and not realistic to require 100% recycled content in many cases.
- Some 100% (and high recycled content) recycled products may call for hygiene concern, e.g. toilet rolls, beverage bottles.



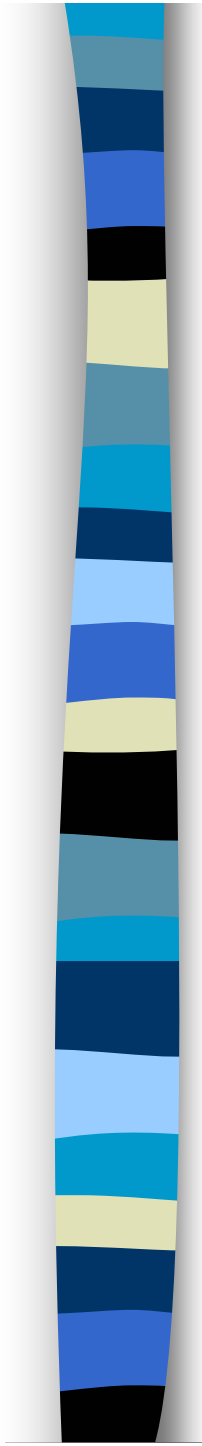
# Organic = Green?

- In Chemistry, being “organic” has a very different meaning. Plastics is “organic” to all chemists.
- Organic produce = pesticide free, toxic-free?
- Is the claimed verified by creditable organization?
- Is the production standard stipulated by law?
- What does organic furniture mean?



# Degradable = Green? (1)

- Degradable trash bags, Park'n shop's degradable plastic carrier bags.
- Because waste in HK is disposed of in landfills that allow limited exposure to elements that promotes degradation, including sun light and oxygen, degradable is invariably slow in for even perishables.



## Degradable = Green? (2)

- Volume-reduction effect for even truly degradable waste is insignificant under the present waste handling and treatment system.
- Hampering normal plastic recycling
- Even if the claimed degradability is real, this is an example of distracting purchasers from a product's true problem.



# Beware of misleading claims (1)

- Most environmental marketing claims are either FALSE or potentially misleading.
- Consumers generally don't have the expertise or ability to verify green product's environmental and consumer values.
- Should credibility of one green product is eroded, skepticism can spread quickly and extensively.



## Beware of misleading claims (2)

- Genuine green claims should bear some of the following characteristics:
- **Specific and objectively verifiable:** ie., just labelling itself “green” or “environmentally friendly” is far from specific in the environmental benefits that it is going to deliver. “Natural” is another vague and ambiguous term.
- Thus, one should be wary of these vague terms.



## Beware of misleading claims (3)

- **Humble** and non-exaggerating: pitfalls include toxic-**free**, **100%** recycled content, GM-**free**.
- Proven by a creditable organisation; as opposed to just making assertion by the producer.
- Ask for a copy of the standard that they are using.

# Beware of misleading claims (4)

- Look for 3rd party endorsement and eco-certification. Uncovering the meaning of eco-labels:

<http://www.greenerchoices.org/eco-labels/>

- Word-of-mouth evangelism.





## Beware of misleading claims (5)

- **Meaningful**: a 100% compostable trash bag has no use in a place where no composting service is available. Is 100% organic better than just “organic”?
- Emphasize on **irrelevant** attribute of the product; e.g. recycled colour pencil.
- Fail to let consumers know that the green performance are actually minimum standards required by law.



# Green product = good product? (1)

- Green appeals are not likely to attract mainstream customers unless they also offer a desirable benefit, such as cost-savings or improved performance.
- Some green products focus too much on “greenness” while neglecting consumer (or regulator) expectations.



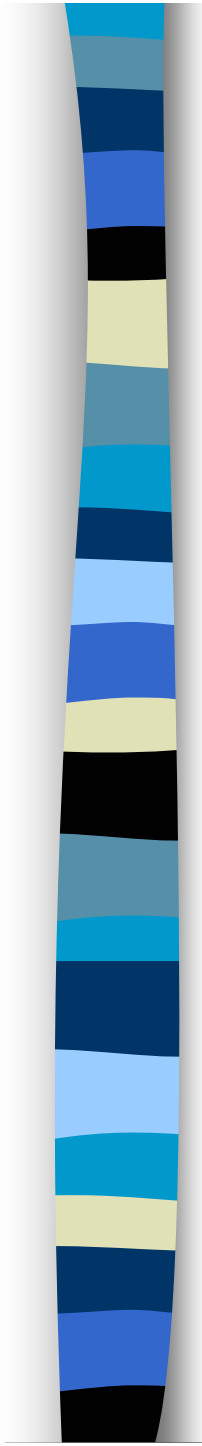
## Green product = good product? (2)

- As corporate consumers, green marketing myopia can be reduced if we **communicate** with and **educate** producers.
- A clear signal to producers: consumers need **truly** environmentally friendly **and** workable products; products that help to address the **root cause** of the problem not just to put more end-of-pipe treatment in place.



# To stretch a little

- To desist green procurement from becoming green fad, both general and green desirable traits should be present for a product.
- Do not overlook your potential contribution.
- What procurement agents should do are:
  - To educate yourselves and the organization,
  - Do communicate your needs across, and
  - Carefully vet green claims.



“You may be surprised at how easy it is to make your voice heard in the marketplace. The marketplace is not a democracy; you don’t need majority opinion to make change. Indeed, **it takes only a fairly small portion of shoppers** – as few as one person in ten – changing buying habits for companies to stand up and take notice.”

(Elkington, Hailes & Makower, 1990: 9-10)



**Goods are good  
and  
more goods  
are better.**

[back](#)