

What's the Deal with marketing claims?

With so many companies using green claims, it's good for you to know what these green terms mean. As you shop and compare products, look for details about what makes the package or product green, or what might have earned it a special seal or certifications.

FREE OF - companies may make a point of letting you know their product are "Free of" a chemical or other ingredient that may be a concern. When marketers say a product is "free of" an ingredient it means the product doesn't have any more than a harmless trace of it—and the product is free of any other ingredients that poses the same kind of risk.

VOC Free - you may have seen products labeled "low-VOC" or "VOC free." VOCs—or volatile organic compounds—are found in paint, household cleaning products, floor polishes, charcoal lighter fluid, windshield wiper fluid and some hair styling products, among other products. They are emitted as gases, and may cause smog by contributing to ground-level ozone formation, or have negative effects on your health.

Non-Toxic - Marketers who say a product is "Non-Toxic" must have proof that the product is safe for both humans and the environment. If it's safe for humans or the environment, the product or package should say which one.

Less Waste – It's not enough for a marketer to claim its product or package is made with "less waste." The company must have specifics about the comparison. For example, a company could say a product has 10% less waste than a previous product.

Seals and Certifications – You see a picture of the globe with the words "Earth Smart" on a product. What does that mean? Seals and certifications can be useful, but only if they are backed up by solid standards and give you enough information to understand what they mean. A package also should tell you about any connections the company has to the organization behind the seal, if a connection might influence your opinion about the certificate or seal. For example: a logo seal from a well known environmental group like the Sierra Club or Green Schools.