

Student Worksheet 2.6

Activity 2.6 It's Not Easy Being Green

As consumers, we are often faced with a wide range of products. There are dozens of different types of breakfast cereal in the local supermarket. Aside from your own individual preferences, how do you select Cheerios over Rice Krispies or Fruit Loops? Environmentally conscious consumers often make choices based on the level of environmental sensitivity of the product. In other words, we look for “environmentally friendly” products -- those that reduce excess packaging, use natural fibers over synthetic ones, and/or contain recycled materials. The “greening” of consumer products has now become quite a cottage industry.

You have been hired by a watch-dog environmental group to investigate the claims made by the producers of an “environmentally friendly” or “green” product. Your task is to scrutinize the advertisements and the product labels for this product and to consider whether the claims they make have any substance. Find examples of environmentally friendly claims on advertising and packaging labels for this product. You can use magazines, newspapers, catalogues, photographs, or other visual media for this exercise. You may need to purchase and use the product, do additional library research on it or a similar product, or even request a catalog or other literature from the producer to help you assess the validity of the claims. In addition, use what you’ve learned from systems theory and thermodynamics to help you identify important factors in measuring the ecological merit of a product.

The environmental group has asked that you prepare a two- to three-page, double-spaced essay summarizing your findings to be published in the group’s monthly newsletter. They have also asked that you produce a collage of the advertisements and product labels to be published with the essay.