

# **A Sustainable Environment: Our Obligation to Protect God's Gift**

by  
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## **What is Really Meant by a Green Product or Service?**

Up until a few years ago, the word “green” usually referred to the U.S. dollar or greenback. Today, the word is mostly associated with the environment. A green product or service implies that it is good for the environment. Some feel that “green” is synonymous with “sustainable”. But how do we really know whether a product or service is really benefiting the environment? Can you believe companies just because they say so?

Take for example BP, short for British Petroleum, a company now promoting a new tag line of “beyond petroleum”. The company is implying that it cares much more for society than making money from oil. BP purchased a large solar panel manufacturer and claims to be the world’s largest in that field. This “shows” that the company is moving in the direction away from oil. However, you may remember last year when the BP pipeline in Alaska leaked over 200,000 gallons of oil because of a corroded pipe. Why didn’t BP spend the necessary capital to prevent the leak? Or worse than that, what about the possible cost cutting measures imposed by the BP management that caused an explosion in early 2005 resulting in the death of 15 employees? And now it wants to expand its Whiting, Indiana facility that will require more ammonia and sludge being added to Lake Michigan. It doesn’t seem that this company truly cares about society and the environment. Is this company truly green? Or is it just “green wash”?

Another company that has an excellent reputation for quality and the environment is Toyota. After all, it has already sold over one million Prius hybrid automobiles. That is really being green. Or is it? In the past 20 years, the fuel consumption of an average Toyota automobile has gone up (average miles per gallon have gone down). Why? Because Toyota, just like GM, Ford and Chrysler, is producing larger cars and SUVs. Two months ago, when the U.S. auto manufacturers were in Washington lobbying against stricter fuel consumption standards, guess who was there with them? That’s right, Toyota. Toyota is a fine company, probably makes the best automobiles, and is the leader in hybrid automobiles, but it is not truly “green”. More “green wash”?

We really need to see the whole picture in determining whether something is green or not. A company can come out with a new line of automobiles that use 50% as much fuel as the previous line. That is truly better efficiency, or eco-efficiency. However, if the company sells three or four times as many automobiles, that is not being green. It is being efficient but it is not sustainable because the total necessary to operate these cars has doubled..

Our university recently installed a new HVAC system in order to provide more efficient heating and cooling. The fuel consumption will be reduced so much that the school will save several million dollars per year in fuel. That is great, but it is not sustainable. It is just being “less bad”. What is sustainable, or truly green, is to employ wind energy or solar energy that does not consume any natural resources.

In the example of the car manufacturer, how can this company be truly green, or sustainable? One way is to produce an automobile that is powered by batteries. You might ask: “When you charge the batteries, are you not using power generated by fossil fuels?” That could be the case, but a truly sustainable company would require the batteries to be charged by wind or solar energy. You may think that we are far from seeing an electric automobile on the road. If you have a chance, try to view the movie “Who Killed the Electric Car” and you will learn how we could have had them on the road today.

Many people are switching to organic food because it is healthier while being “green”. Without the use of pesticides or artificial fertilizers, the farm growing the organic products will have less of a detrimental impact on the environment. But if the organic food is shipped, say, 2000 miles to get to your dinner table, how sustainable is that? How much fuel was used to transport that food to you? If you are truly into organic food, look for it from a local farm.

Architects and developers are becoming more and more interested in LEED certified buildings – buildings that are energy and environmentally efficient. One way to earn points towards the certification is using building materials produced less than 500 miles from the construction site. However, the building materials don’t have to be produced sustainably; just be manufactured near the site. In this case, one can earn “environmental” points for using materials that are not sustainable.

If you truly want to be “green”, look at the total system and determine what impact you are having on the environment. The first step is to be eco-efficient, but we must also be eco-effective in order to protect our environment. The bottom line: there is no standard for calling a product green. It’s whatever the company wants to call it.