



Massachusetts Interfaith Power and Light NEWS

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Dear MIP&L members and friends,

GREENWASHING

by Russell Foxworthy

Greenwashing is a new term that is used frequently among environmental activists and in the media. The word derives from the word "whitewashing" which is defined as — *Anything, as deceptive words or actions, used to cover up or gloss over faults, errors, or wrongdoings, or absolve a wrongdoer from blame.*

Greenwashing is a similar concept that refers to trying to make a product or company appear greener than it actually is. Specifically **greenwashing** tries to cover up poor environmental records by emphasizing purportedly environmentally friendly programs.



Some examples include energy companies that claim they have gone green by investing in alternative energies, but in fact are primarily invested in fossil fuels. British Petroleum is a prime example of an energy company that spends a lot of money trying to create an environmental public image. It has a new advertising campaign trying to brand itself as "Beyond Petroleum" and emphasize its investments in alternative energies, despite having these investments pale in comparison to its fossil fuel investments. The Beyond Petroleum ad campaign was a huge marketing success. BP's brand awareness rose from 4% in 2000 to 67% in 2007. Despite claims of going "beyond petroleum," BP invested only 7% of profits into renewable energies in 2008, a number that has since declined.

Other oil companies have done much less, but still try to brand themselves as caring about renewable energies. For example, ExxonMobil commercial states that "It's going to be vital that we develop all sources of energy to fuel the future growth of the world economy and its growing population. It's going to be oil, and gas, coal, nuclear, wind, and solar. We're going to need them all." On their website they even claim that "ExxonMobil is committed to operating throughout the world in a way that protects the environment." Despite these claims of environmental passion, ExxonMobil spent less than .025% of their profits on renewable energies in 2008. By comparison, ExxonMobil spent three times that on lobbyists and campaign contributions.

Companies can also **greenwash** by promoting a product as greener than it really is. For example, a company may claim that its fruits and vegetables are green because they are harvested by hand rather than fossil fuel burning machines. However, if they are grown in South America or Asia, the fossil fuels required to bring the products to the United States may be greater than the carbon emissions saved by natural harvesting. Clean coal is another product that is advertised as greener than it really is. They call it clean, even though such coal still emits 23% of the harmful pollutants it used to. Considering coal is one of the dirtiest burning energy sources on the planet, this is certainly not clean.



It is important to understand that not all companies with green products are just trying to make a profit off the mass appeal of environmentalism. Some companies do genuinely care about the environmental crisis. So how does one distinguish between the frauds and the honest suppliers? There are two ways: researching for honesty, and personal education. See if the company is telling the truth. Look at its organization as a whole; is it a company known for environmental advocacy? A google search will often be able to answer this question. Simply google the company's name along with the word "environment" and see what comes up. The results will usually be able to show which companies are authentic environmentalists that manufacture sustainable products and which companies are phonies.

If you do not always have a computer handy or do not have the time to research every green product you consider buying, it is important to be educated on environmental issues so that you can determine whether a product is really green or not yourself. Educate yourself on environmental issues, and know the ramifications of consumerism and how they affect the environment.

It is important not to give in to **greenwashing** for several reasons. First, if you believe something is greener than it actually is, then you may be tempted to buy more of the product and end up hurting the environment. Second, as a consumer you may end up paying more for "green products," as they can sometimes be more costly, though true environmental products are always cheaper when external costs are accounted for. If you are susceptible to **greenwashing**, then you might end up paying more for products that are not sustainable. Third, if you are able to determine which companies are **greenwashing** and which companies are authentic, then you can support the true environmental companies and help keep them in business, eventually forcing other companies to follow in their footsteps.



100 Days Survey – Where do we go from here?



It is now less than one hundred days away from October 24, the day when together we'll manage to change the debate on global warming – away from narrow politics and towards a planet with a future.

"Together" is the key word in that sentence – it won't happen without you. We need every hand on deck in these last precious weeks.

And to make sure all those hands are working in harmony, it would be an enormous help if you could fill out this quick survey to help answer some key strategic questions for 350.org moving forward. Your answers will help our team better serve the growing international climate movement, and will help determine how we play our cards in the months ahead. The poll is just 8 questions long – visit this link to add your voice: <http://www.350.org/survey>.

Remember – we're not an organization exactly, we're more of an open source campaign – so we rely on the help of friends and allies all over the world. We're working with everyone from established environmental organizations to local schools.

With great faith,

Bill McKibben for the entire 350.org Team

EES of the Month — CARBON OFFSETTING



Traveling this summer? Running the air conditioner? Want to know how to offset what you generate?

Go to the MIP&L homepage and click on the [EES of the Month](#) link.

And then implement, at home, at your house-of-worship, and everywhere!

If we don't, who will????

Know somebody who should receive this newsletter?

Let us know. We're happy to add all to the list. And of course, **just forward it now!** (use the forward link at the bottom of this newsletter).

To add to our list, visit our website, click "[Join our E-mail List](#)" (under "Membership") and fill the sign up box.

Or send us an email at MIPandL@MIPandL.org with the email addresses to be added to our mailing list. Write "add to MIP&L email" in the subject line.

OUR THANKS ...

to the following members, now current on annual member fees.

If your congregation is not on this list, please attend to this now.

If you have questions, email mipandl@mipandl.org.

Boston (Arlington Street Church)
Cambridge (1st Parish)
Newton (Eliot)
Salem (1st Parish)
Weymouth (Trinity)
Episcopal Diocese of Massachusetts



Peace and blessings,

Your friends at MIP&L