

Skye Con Green Update

Bamboo - Green Wash Cloths or Just Green Wash?

Green Washing can be defined as making exaggerated, false, or misleading environmental claims to create added demand for a product or service. Some of the current marketing of bamboo fabrics fit this definition. Misleading claims about bamboo fabrics have gained the attention of the Federal Trade Commission (FTC), and penalties have been levied for some of these claims.

The claims being questioned are that these fabrics are manufactured using environmentally friendly processes, are biodegradable, and have natural antimicrobial properties. The FTC has challenged all of these claims.

Natural bamboo does indeed have inherent antimicrobial properties. If the bamboo has been mechanically processed into fiber for fabrics, it may (emphasis on may) retain antimicrobial characteristics. However, in the most common method of transforming bamboo into a fabric, i.e. using the cellulose in the bamboo to make rayon, not only are the antimicrobial properties lost, but the process is also chemical intensive, eliminating any environmental benefits. According to the FTC, the process "uses toxic chemicals and results in the emission of hazardous air pollutants." Additionally, according to the FTC, an unqualified claim of biodegradability cannot be made for these fabrics.

The conclusion? The typical bamboo fabric is not a good environmental choice.

I have worked with the FTC in developing and promoting the Guides to Environmental Marketing Claim. If you are considering bamboo fabrics, I would be happy to help evaluate the claims based on my familiarity with The Guides.

On a broader note, even if the bamboo fabric retained antimicrobial effectiveness, that is not necessarily beneficial. It is difficult or impossible to find unbiased support for the use of antimicrobial treatments in fabrics, and the American Medical Association is very concerned about the overuse of these products. More about this later.

Note that nothing in these comments relates to the use of sustainably grown bamboo used in furniture and floors. The FTC's current concern is about misleading environmental claims for bamboo fabrics, not furniture or floors.

You may go to this FTC website for more information: <http://www.ftc.gov/opa/2009/08/bamboo.shtm>

Green Lodging News also recently published an article on this subject.

<http://www.greenlodgingnews.com/Content.aspx?id=4146>

Please email me with any questions about bamboo or other environmental questions you may have.

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