



Know your environment.
Protect your health.

October 12, 2016

Use of the Term “Organic” on Non-Food Products in EWG’s Databases

A recent joint study by the Federal Trade Commission and U.S. Department of Agriculture about consumer perceptions of organic claims on non-food products raises concerns that consumers are potentially being misled by the use of the term “organic” on non-food products. The study indicates that roughly one-third of respondents believe that organic claims for non-food products meet government standards, and roughly the same proportion believe that the U.S. Department of Agriculture certifies these organic claims. The results of the study also suggest that a significant percentage of consumers likely believe that a non-food product which makes an unqualified organic claim contains only organic ingredients.

In order to better understand the extent to which organic claims are being made for non-food products, EWG conducted a review of two of its databases: Skin Deep® and the Guide to Healthy Cleaning. We searched for products that used the term “organic” in the product name, the brand name, the product’s ingredient list or elsewhere on the label, where available.

About EWG’s Databases

EWG launched Skin Deep® in 2004 to create online profiles for cosmetics and personal care products detailing their potential hazards and health concerns. To compile the database, our staff scientists compare the ingredients on personal care product labels and websites to information in nearly 60 toxicity and regulatory databases. Skin Deep® currently contains information on roughly 62,000 cosmetics and personal care products, rating them on a scale from 1-10 with 1 being the best score and 10 being the worst.

EWG’s Guide to Healthy Cleaning, released in 2012, provides the public with information about the ingredients in cleaning products. EWG’s staff scientists compared the ingredients listed on cleaning product labels, websites and worker safety documents with the information available in the top government, industry and academic toxicity databases and the scientific literature on health and environmental problems tied to cleaning products. The Guide now contains information on 2,574 products, grading them on a scale from A to F.

Summary of Key Findings:

Skin Deep® Database

- At least 6 percent of the current products in Skin Deep® used the term “organic” in the product name.
- At least 48 brands appearing in Skin Deep® used the term “organic” in the brand name.
- The term “organic” appeared at least once on 5,450 cosmetics or personal care products in Skin Deep®, either in the name of the product, in the product’s brand name, on the product label or in the product’s ingredient list. Of these products, at least:
 - 1,136 products received a score of 3 or above;
 - 261 products received a score of 5 or above;
 - 39 products received a score of 7 or above; and
 - 4 products received a score of 9 or 10.



Guide to Healthy Cleaning

- The term “organic” appeared at least once for 93 cleaning products (out of 2,574) in the database, either in the name of the product, in the product’s brand name, on the product label or in the product’s ingredient list.
- 45 of these products had the term “organic” in the product name, but only three of the 45 qualified the term “organic” (i.e., made with organic lavender).
- Out of the 93 cleaning products where the term “organic” appeared at least once, one out of five products received a grade of C, D or F in the database.
- Seven products for which the term “organic” appeared at least once received a failing grade.

Searches for Organic Products in EWG’s Databases

Between Jan. 1 and Oct. 11, 2016, there were 153,520 unique searches of the Skin Deep® database that included the term “organic” – an average of 538 searches a day. While this represented just 1.31 percent of the 11.7 million searches of the Skin Deep® database in 2016 so far, people searching for organic products tended to stay in the database 15 percent longer than the average visitor.

Of the 153,520 unique searches that included the term “organic,” searches for just the term “organic” ranked 14th of the most common searches, meaning that most people searched for products or brands with organic in the name, not organic as a category. This trend comports well with how most visitors interact with EWG’s databases. For instance, the top 10 searches in Skin Deep® were for specific products or brands, not categories of products (i.e., mascara) or specific ingredients of concern.

Between Jan. 1 and Oct. 11, 2016, there were 8,481 unique searches of EWG’s Guide to Healthy Cleaning database (out of a total of 1,040,575 unique searches) that included the term “organic.” This amounted to roughly 30 searches a day. Of these 8,481 unique searches, searches solely for the term “organic” ranked 21st, meaning that most people are searching for products or brand names that include the term “organic.” In the Guide to Healthy Cleaning, 17 of the top 20 searches were for a product or brand name, while only three of the top 20 searches were for a type of product (i.e., laundry detergent).