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Green Inc.



Energy, the Environment and the Bottom Line

May 31, 2007, 10:54 am

Shell and 'Flower Power'

By [James Kanter](#)

Axel Seidemann/AP

The first thing I noticed about [one of the new advertisements from Shell](#) was the hippie-era font, which seemed to me to be a rather playful touch for the oil giant. The lettering, and the message, could easily have graced one of those posters from the Summer of Love: "Don't Throw Anything Away. There Is No Away."

But one of the first things that folks at Friends of the Earth did when they saw the same advertisement — presumably after spitting out their coffee — was to [file complaints to advertising standards authorities](#) in three European countries.

The advertisement is misleading in at least two ways, according to Paul de Clerck of Friends of the Earth. It shows industrial smokestacks emitting brightly colored flowers rather than smoke and it uses an advertising slogan to suggest that Shell doesn't create any waste.

I talked to de Clerck on Thursday, and he said authorities in Belgium could make a decision on whether the advertisement is misleading by the end of June, and that Dutch authorities would hold a hearing with Friends of the Earth and Shell on June 12. The group still was waiting to hear from authorities in Britain.

I also spoke to Olga Gorodilina, a spokeswoman for Shell. She was not able to say whether Shell still was running the advertisement, but she said the campaign was fair and designed to help governments and industry and consumers meet the energy challenge and the CO2 challenge.

What do you think when energy companies - Shell is not alone - use environmental imagery in their advertising campaigns? Are they a sign that such companies are adapting their businesses to a low-carbon economy? Should such advertising be vetted to protect the interests of consumers and investors?

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6 Comments

1. 1. May 31, 2007 2:54 pm [Link](#)

It is a shame that a multi-national corporation like Shell is not serious about reducing its dumping of toxic chemicals on its fence line neighbours and resorts to using flowers as a means to hide its pollution in poor neighbourhoods in South Africa. Shell should use its profit to clean up its mess in South Durban and elsewhere in the world.

— *DESMOND D'SA SOUTH DURBAN SOUTH AFRICA*

2. 2. May 31, 2007 5:08 pm [Link](#)

That's not honest, of course. However we can't change the whole world and marketing campaigns will always try to show a better image from the company than it really is. Don't we all work like this when we are writing our CV?

The problem is maybe that there isn't yet anyplace on the market for "green companies" and our responsibility is involved in this. Do we really do our best in everyday life to reduce the greenhouse effects? Of course we could do better. If we bought organic food only, respectful cars and preferred the train rather than aircraft, there would be a real economic change. The environment would be used through marketing for marketing but for the environment too. So long as we don't make things change - as consumers - and even if Shell stopped its advertising campaign, we are not on the right way.

— *N. Wilhelm, Le Beaucet/France*

3. 3. May 31, 2007 11:49 pm [Link](#)

Shell and companies like them that advertise themselves as "green" are more dangerous than the Exxon's and others who are open about how they don't care about the planet. Blaming the victims, the consumers is an equal load of bull.

We don't have proper choices because oil companies run the show and their corrupt cronies in government grovel at their feet.

Shell should be sued everytime they open their mouths with lies like these adverts!

— *Denny Larson, San Francisco, CA, USA*

4. 4. May 31, 2007 11:55 pm [Link](#)

There is an apt term that is used to describe this form of advertising which is called, 'corporate

greenwashing'. Many examples abound in this arena that spares no one and which usually targets those companies responsible for the most damage to the environment.

Take for instance, BP (British Petroleum) which is not new to this game. In the recent past they heralded this age of corporate greenwashing by re-branding themselves under the Helios logo, a direct homage to the Greek sun god.

Over the years, various organizations such as Greenpeace and CorpWatch have come up with a sarcastic take on the efforts taken up by corporations to 'go green'. Their attempts to shed light on these apparently eco-friendly practices done by corporations have led to the pompous celebration of multinationals under the rubric of the now-infamous Greenwash awards.

Taken from the CorpWatch website (corpwatch.org), the Greenwash awards herald, "corporations that put more money, time and energy into slick PR campaigns aimed at promoting their eco-friendly images, than they do to actually protecting the environment." The question now is, when will Shell be winning a coveted award for its newly devised ad campaign?

— *Dong, Seoul, South Korea*

5. 5. June 1, 2007 9:41 am [Link](#)

Right message, wrong product. This is a clear example of a large petrochemical company co-opting a green message for its own means while giving almost nothing back.

Shell are very naive to think that we are not going to notice this gigantic credibility gap, and pat them on the head for passing on a green message.

There is no away? There is no integrity.

— *Lucy Wills, London, UK*

6. 6. June 14, 2007 9:05 am [Link](#)

I have not seen the Shell ads, but do know of a program whereby CO2 is being piped directly from Shell refineries at Pernis (Rotterdam) into greenhouses in the nearby market gardening region. The CO2 stimulates plant and produce growth, and is normally generated by burning natural gas just for the purpose. So the program reduces CO2 emission into the atmosphere, cuts down on the use of natural gas, and makes for better produce. A neat greenhouse effect, or?

— *doubledutch, Brussels/Belgium*

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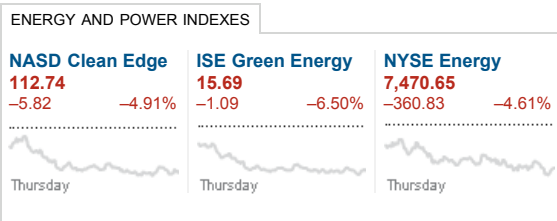
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Green Inc. Staff

Tom Zeller Jr.

Editor



After a year as an editor at large for National Geographic magazine, Tom returned to The New York Times in July 2008 to help expand the paper's coverage of sustainable energy development and green business. He has spent much of the last decade as a reporter and editor covering a variety of topics for The Times – from technology and cyberfraud to culture and politics.

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Kate Galbraith

Reporter



Ms. Galbraith joined The New York Times in June 2008 to write about renewable energy. She spent the previous year as a Nieman Fellow at Harvard University, and before that she was the Southwest correspondent for The Economist based in Austin, Tex. She is an avid runner and hiker, having grown up camping most summers in the Sierra Nevada.

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James Kanter

Reporter



Mr. Kanter has been a staff correspondent for The International Herald Tribune in Paris and Brussels since 2005, covering European business affairs and the business of green. His previous experience includes four years in Southeast Asia, where he was the editor in chief of The Cambodia Daily in Phnom Penh and oversaw coverage of environmental issues like uncontrolled logging.

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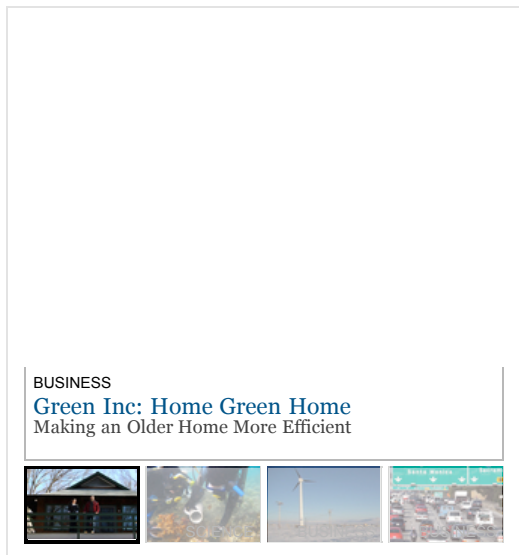
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