

What makes a “green” product green?

You see products all the time that claim “made from 30% post-consumer recycled fibers” or “FSC certified”. There is a growing trend for companies to offer products that are green, or environmentally friendly. But how green is green? The product is renewable (oak), but is it *rapidly* renewable (bamboo)?

More and more companies are claiming that they offer a green product, but don’t take their word for it. These are some things to look out for when determining how green a product is.¹

First things first, look at the manufacturer offering the product:

- Do they have an environmental policy?
- Do they recycle waste?
- Do they encourage employees to carpool, use mass transit, or bike to work?
- Use energy efficient production methods?
- Do they use minimal packing materials?
- How do they transport the product?

Next, examine the product offered:

- What are the materials used to create the product?
- Where do the materials come from? (Do they use local or imported materials?)
- Did the materials come from rapidly renewable resources? (soy, bamboo, cork, etc)
- Is the product made of recycled materials? Pre-consumer or post-consumer?
- Is the wood reclaimed?
- Does the product emit any harmful substances (VOCs)?
- If there are wood components, is the wood FSC certified?
- How much energy does it use?
- How is the product installed?
- How is the product maintained and cleaned?
- Is the product (or parts of it) biodegradable or recyclable?
- Can materials left over after installation be returned to the manufacturer for recycling?
- Does it comply with industry standards? Are test results available?
- Has it been tested by a green product certification program?

Quick Reference Chart for Product Certifications

Certification	Product	Website
Green Seal	Variety, including countertops, cabinets, paint	www.greenseal.org
GREENGUARD	Construction materials, paints, cleaning and paper products	www.greenguard.org
FSC	Wood	www.fsc.org
CRI Green Label	Carpet, cushions, and adhesives	www.carpet-rug.com
SCS Floor Score	Hard surface flooring and adhesives	www.scscertified.com
EPA WaterSense	Plumbing fixtures	www.epa.gov/WaterSense/
EPA Energy Star	Appliances, lighting, equipment	www.energystar.gov

¹Adapted from REGREEN Product Checklist