

Green for green

Consumers trying to ease their conscience should be on their guard when buying into enviro-marketing -- activists warn that the only green thing about some of these products is the money the manufacturer makes.

OTTAWA (CUP)--

by Samer Muscati

While environmental awareness is on the rise, a wide variety of "green" and enviro-friendly products are being made available to soothe the concerns of consumers who may not always know what they're buying.

Some organizations have found this public acceptance as a good opportunity for protecting and preserving the environment. Others are seeing it as a new sales gimmick, for making "green" money.

Community activist, Alison Gale, is unhappy with the false sense of security green products provide.

"Green products upset me in numerous ways; the way they are labelled, marketed, and the image they provide," said Gale. "How can motor oil be green?"

Almost every product available on the market today has some sort of environmental logo. The two most widely used logos are "biodegradable" and "recyclable".

The label "biodegradable" does not mention the length of time and conditions required for a product to be broken down. This makes the term vague because almost everything will break down eventually. Furthermore, "biodegradable" is not necessarily a good thing. Biodegradable plastics contain a mixture of plastic and starch that break down into thousands of tiny pieces which may be worse than plastic bags and sheets that at least stay in one place and could be more easily disposed of.

Almost every plastic container on the market has the "recyclable" logo. Technically this is true, but realistically it may be no more than another sales gimmick. Plastics come in many formulations and usually only the manufacturer knows how to take them apart. Today the cost of

recycling plastics is prohibitively expensive and there is still nothing that can be 100 per cent recycled.

Advertisers also use catchy phrases such as "For people who care about the environment," and "Something can be done," which are in-

make it environmental," said Kaulbars. "Some individuals are sincere in providing less damaging products, but others are simply cashing in on the trend."

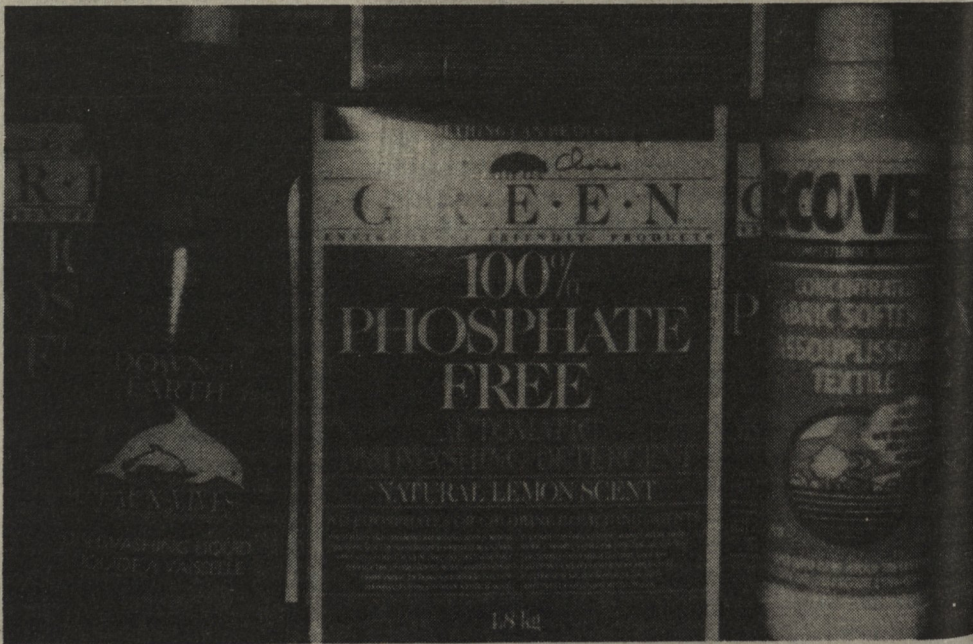
The product developer for Arbour Recycled Products, Adrienne Armstrong, also dislikes the labels of big companies' green products.

"There is a lack of product information on containers. Some containers say 'recyclable' -- where? In Kalamazoo?" asked Armstrong.

She advises consumers to "be sceptical and ask questions" in order to learn more about products, in all stores, including Arbour.

She said she believes people can do their part in preserving the environment by consuming less.

"People should ask themselves if they re-



tended for consumers to feel good about buying their product, but offer no concrete information.

Some chain supermarkets are selling "enviro-friendly" products in bulk, ranging from green toilet paper to green light bulbs. However, criticism is increasing in view of the apparent conflict between environmental initiatives and business interests. Peace and Environment Resource Centre coordinator, Mike Kaulbars, believes that consumers are misinformed about green products.

"Just because something is better, it doesn't

ally need the product. Do you really need a new pair of jeans and shoes," she said. "We should be thinking globally and acting locally."

Our society produces more waste than it can ecologically handle and there are only a certain number of landfills that can be made available. Canada generates 32 million tonnes of municipal waste each year, 31 per cent of which is packaging material. Less than 2 per cent of Canada's waste is recycled and according to the United Nations "extinction is inevitable," unless people start changing their consumption habits. ●