Confusion surrounds eco-friendly claims by manufacturers

By Sandy Bauers, Philadelphia Inquirer

The grocery store can be so confusing. I'd like to buy greener products, but it's hard to figure which they are.

Is it the "all natural," "entirely natural," or "100% natural" food? Poison ivy and salmonella are natural, too.

Is it the "biodegradable" cleaning wipes? The dish soap that proclaims the company "helps save wildlife"? Or the cleaner with three logos: Sierra Club, "Natural Products Association Certified," and the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency's "Design for the Environment"?

The bad news is that there is no simple, universally recognized label akin to, say, the UL symbol for electrical products that meet safety standards set by Underwriters Laboratories (which, it so happens, recently jumped into the crowded green field with a subsidiary called UL Environment).

The good news is that James Kohm feels my pain.

Starting about 2005, there's been "a tsunami of green claims coming into the marketplace," he said.

Kohm is an enforcement director at the Federal Trade Commission, an agency that is trying to sort all this out.

To be sure, consumers want safer, and greener, products. So marketers are responding. Products are labeled recycled, recyclable, ozone-friendly, nontoxic, and more.

Labels and certifications wear your politics on their sleeves.

A few months ago, the U.S. Department of Agriculture introduced its “BioPreferred” label for products whose ingredients are at least one-quarter renewable plant, animal, marine, or forestry materials.

Looking for products that are manufactured using wind energy? A consortium of companies and groups now has a “WindMade” label.

Bill Daddi has counted 350 green seals – including the one he represents, the Green Seal.

Read the whole story

Olympic moment in the Tahoe-Truckee real estate world

By Bob Shallit, Sacramento Bee

Debbie Meyer, the former Sacramentan who won three swimming gold medals at the 1968 Olympics, is selling her scenic home in Truckee.

Her real estate agent? Jeff Hamilton, who won a bronze medal at the 1992 Winter Olympics in France for speed skiing – a demonstration sport that year.

Hamilton tells us the two met a few years ago when his kids started taking swimming lessons from Meyer.

“Olympians gravitate toward each other sometimes,” he says.

Meyer and her husband own two homes in the Truckee area. They’re selling one – with an asking price of $759,000 – and

moving into the other.

Hamilton, a Tahoe-area agent with Chase International, says he tends not to play up his Olympic achievement of flying down slopes at 150 miles per hour.

Not with new clients, anyway.

As he puts it, “I want people to know I have skills other than going straight downhill.”

TRPA: Amphibious tourist mobile not hurting lake clarity

By Anne Knowles

If you’re wondering if you saw a white boat with wheels drive off Highway 50 into Lake Tahoe sometime this summer, you did. And if you’re wondering if it’s legal, it is.

Tahoe Duck Tours, in its first full summer of operations, is offering daily, multiple hour-plus tours of the lake on its amphibious vehicles it calls ducks. The World War II-era boats feature six wheels, a watertight hull, a propeller and a canopy-covered deck that seats 24.

Several times a day, the ducks pick up passengers at Heavenly Village near Stateline and travel the five miles via 50 and Tahoe Keys Boulevard to the Tahoe Keys Marina where they enter the water. An hour and 20 minutes later, they emerge and make the five-mile trek back, but not before being cleaned of milfoil, an invasive weed found in the lake.



A duck boat driver/captain was cleaning underneath the vehicle/boat Aug. 18 at the Tahoe Keys Marina parking lot before hopping aboard. Photo/Kathryn Reed

“We take a lot of plant material off,” said Shawn Kearney, owner of Tahoe Duck Tours in South Lake Tahoe. “The boat gets dirtier than we get the lake.”

Each vehicle is cleaned of road sediment once a day, in the morning before the first trip. And they take additional care on the boats’ exteriors.

“We use food-grade oil, the same used on meat slicers, for anything that comes in contact with the water,” Kearney said. “It is non-toxic.”

The ducks are permitted by the Tahoe Regional Planning Agency as well as regulated by the U.S. Coast Guard and the California Highway Patrol.

The TRPA permit is a two-year, commercial boating permit issued to Swimming Truck LLC – aka Tahoe Duck Boats – issued

July 29, 2010. It limits the boats to five trips a day per boat, seven days a week, in July and August, and to no more than three trips a day per vehicle three days a week in April, May, June, September and October. Tahoe Duck Tours paid an $868.80 air quality mitigation fee and a $1,000 monitoring fee.

The boats can launch only from Tahoe Keys Marina and pick up customers at the Stateline Transit Center, adjacent to Heavenly Village, and cannot enter any other body of water without additional review and approval from the TRPA. An additional memorandum of understating prohibits the boats from going into other waters even when not operating as a business in order to prevent invasive weeds and species located elsewhere from entering Lake Tahoe.

The permit also requires the daily cleaning and maintenance and the removal of all aquatic vegetation prior to entering and exiting the lake, and says the boats are subject to random inspections.

“As part of the permitting process they completed an environmental check list and we did not identify any impacts,” said Ken Kasman, shorezone coordinator for the TRPA, who was involved in issuing Tahoe Duck Boats permit.

The daily cleaning, said Kasman, involves washing the entire vehicle including the undercarriage, vacuuming the entire system including the bilge pump and applying a degreaser.

“They have spent considerable time cleaning the vehicles and making sure there is no loose grease,” he said.

Kasman also said the boats launch from one of the busiest marinas at the lake, where trailers for other boats haul in fine sediment as well.

“It’s unfair to specifically call these guys out,” Kasman said. “They’re not creating any significant impact.”

The boat operator is an “excellent partner in fighting the spread of aquatic invasive species in Lake Tahoe,” according to Ted Thayer, TRPA’s aquatic invasive species program manager. In addition to cleaning the boat of milfoil, which is mandatory, and using vegetable oil on the boat, which is not, Tahoe Duck Boats makes TRPA educational material on invasive species available and educates passengers about the issue during the ride, said Thayer.

“They have been very good partners and stewards of the lake,” Thayer said in an email to *Lake Tahoe News*.

Lahontan Regional Water Quality Control Board has no jurisdiction over the boats.

“We don’t regulate boats, but we do regulate the marinas,” said Lauri Kemper, assistant executive officer at the California agency. “The marinas are obligated to report to us.”

Kemper said she has received no complaints, either officially or anecdotally from the public, about the boats.

The boats have been nearly full all summer and hired for a couple additional private parties, said Kearney, but business has slowed down in the last week. The boats currently run Monday through Friday at 11am, 1pm and 3pm, and Saturday and Sunday hourly from 11am to 4pm. After Labor Day, the schedule will be reduced to Wednesday through Sunday, three times a day, until the end of September.

Tickets are $30 for adults, $27 for seniors and active duty personnel, $19 for children older than 3, and $8 for children under 3 years old.

Whooping cough vaccination clinics on North Shore

All students entering grades 7-12 in California must provide proof of immunization against whooping cough (also known as pertussis) for the upcoming school year.

Placer County will also be offering additional Tdap vaccine clinics for the North Tahoe and Truckee area in collaboration with the Tahoe Truckee Unified School District. There is no cost for the vaccine due to support from the California Department of Public Health for these school-based clinics. The vaccine will be offered at the following locations:

Truckee High School – Aug. 22 3-7pm

North Tahoe School – Aug. 23 10am-2pm

Alder Creek Middle School – Aug. 25 4-6pm

Vaccinating students will be the priority at these clinics; however, others may also be able to get the vaccine if supplies last.

For more information, call (530) 889.7161.

Garridos deny involvement in disappearance of Bay Area girl

By Eric Kurhi, Oakland Tribune

HAYWARD – Nearly two years after Hayward police mounted a major search of the property near Antioch belonging to Phillip and Nancy Garrido in hopes of finding clues related to the disappearance of Michaela Garecht, investigators finally talked to the couple, who maintained their innocence.

Investigators spoke with each of the Garridos for more than two hours last week.

“It was nothing earth-shattering,” Sgt. Corey Quinn said. “Both denied having anything to do with Michaela’s disappearance.”

Philip Garrido, a twice-convicted kidnapper and rapist, previously told El Dorado County investigators that while he is responsible for at least three more abductions and dozens of date rapes, he had nothing to do with the high-profile abduction of 9-year-old Michaela in 1988.

Hayward investigators remain interested, however, and plan to look at evidence taken from the Garridos’ compound in the next week and to conduct more interviews with the pair.

Shortly after Jaycee Dugard surfaced in August 2009, police from various agencies converged on the Garridos’ compound, where Dugard was held for 18 years.

Hayward police conducted what was called the most extensive search in the history of the department because of strong similarities to the 1988 disappearance of Michaela, snatched from a Hayward grocery store’s parking lot.

Read the whole story

Sold out Burning Man sparks quest for tickets

By Ed Fletcher, Sacramento Bee

One might think the high winds, scorching heat, chilling overnight lows or remote location would be enough to keep people away from Burning Man.

But for the first time in its 25-year history, Burning Man's organizers were forced last month to announce that tickets for the counterculture event were sold out.

Even the guy who wrote the book on Burning Man was caught off guard.

"I didn't have my ticket," said Brian Doherty, author of 2005's "This Is Burning Man."

"I know they said that it could happen, but nobody expected something that has never happened before, to happen. Every single one of us should have planned ahead."

The ticket shortage has triggered a scramble for them by some, scalping by others and concern over what the appropriate size of the event should be.

Ticket sales were not allowed to grow this year because of a permitting issue with the federal Bureau of Land Management, which manages the Black Rock Desert playa where the annual festival takes place.

With its old permit lapsing, event organizer Black Rock City LLC was given a one-year permit to continue operating while a new agreement undergoes environmental study. Instead of receiving its usual 6 percent growth allotment, the organization was required to remain at its 2010 population – approximately 50,000 people.

Read the whole story

USFS historian talks about travel in the basin

Learn about the evolution of Tahoe travel from renowned U.S. Forest Service historian and recreation officer Don Lane on Aug. 24 at 8pm at the Lake of the Sky Amphitheater on the South Shore

Lane knows Tahoe and had published “Tahoe Tales of Bygone Days and Memorable Pioneers,” which will be part of the talk.

The talk is free, but donations will be accepted by the Tahoe Heritage Foundation to support the Taylor Creek Summer Speaker Series.

For more information, call (530) 543.2674.

TRCD looking for another board member

South Lake Tahoe-based environmental organization Tahoe Resource Conservation District is seeking a member to serve on its five-person board of directors.

Board members are appointed by the El Dorado County Board of Supervisors. They serve a voluntary, four-year term.

Applicants are required to reside or own property in the Lake Tahoe Basin in either Placer or El Dorado counties. Submit a letter of interest along with a county committee application to the El Dorado County Board of Supervisors by Sept. 30

Applications are available online.

Tahoe Resource Conservation District's mission is to promote the conservation and improvement of the Lake Tahoe Basin's soil, water, and related natural resources by providing leadership, information, programs, and technical assistance to all land managers, owners, organizations, and residents. Tahoe RCD is a non-regulatory, grant funded, public agency that works with a variety of partner agencies to implement programs and outreach, which currently focus on erosion control, runoff infiltration, terrestrial and aquatic invasive species control, and conservation landscaping.

Doctor to give talk on children's food allergies

According to the Food Allergy & Anaphylaxis Network, nearly 3 million children in the United States have food allergies, and the incidence in those under the age of 3 is one in 17. The good news is many children will grow out of them.

Kahle Community Center will host Jennifer Ehmann from Barton Pediatrics on Aug. 23. She will discuss food allergies and their effects on children, especially allergies and alternatives to certain foods.

The lecture is from 6:30 to 7:30pm at 236 Kingsbury Grade, Stateline.

This lecture is part of the 2011 Barton Health & Wellness Lecture Series. It is free.

Placerville council members calling for mayor to resign

By Carlos Alcalá and Peter Hecht, Sacramento Bee

A majority of Placerville City Council members are calling on Mayor David Machado to step down in the wake of his arrest Thursday on felony charges connected with his property holdings in the city.

In addition, officials have amended the agenda for Tuesday's meeting to consider removing Machado from the position of mayor and requesting him to take an indefinite leave from the City Council.

"The City neither condones nor ignores activity such as that spelled out in the District Attorney's Complaint," according to a statement released Friday by City Manager Cleve Morris.

The complaint alleges that Machado hid ownership of property within the city's redevelopment zone in violation of disclosure laws. It also said he did unpermitted work on his properties within the city and attempted, in some cases, to cover that up.

The DA's criminal complaint puts the allegations into two counts – one of perjury, one of conspiracy – backed by 30 enumerated "overt acts" Machado is alleged to have committed.

It is not known whether Machado, 53, has secured legal representation, and he has not responded to phone calls or

visits to his home address.

Read the whole story