

UNITED STATES ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION AGENCY
GUIDANCE FROM HOTLINE COMPENDIUM

WSG H13

SUBJECT: Marketing and Advertising Tactics and Techniques

SOURCE: Charlene Shaw

What is the EPA doing to discourage or prevent Point of Use (POU) distributors from misleading the public through false or distorted claims regarding EPA's involvement with their product?

Response:

It has come to the attention of the Office of Drinking Water that the EPA and the Safe Drinking Water Hotline are receiving many calls concerning home water treatment units. One company, the National Safety Association, seems to have surfaced as a front runner in consumer inquiries and complaints. Apparently, they have been searching the U.S. for distributors for their product. These potential distributors and their customers have been calling the EPA for more information on the unit and its "approval" by the EPA. A tape is provided to potential buyers showing the EPA logo along side the company logo implying a partnership in providing a quality product.

Action to Date

At the request of Peter Cook, Deputy Director, Office of Drinking Water, Charlene Shaw (ODW) contacted the Federal Trade Commission to find out if this company was violating any FTC rules by operating in this manner. She spoke with Joel Winston (FTC) and he indicated his interest in pursuing their advertising practices. The case was assigned to Steve Toporoff (FTC) for investigation.

Information Gathering

Mr. Toporoff (FTC) indicated that it was necessary to begin gathering information to support a case. He suggested that whenever possible, the name, address and phone number of concerned individuals telephoning the Safe Drinking Water Hotline or the EPA should be recorded and sent, through Charlene Shaw's office, to him.

Any offer by the Hotline caller to send printed material should be encouraged. Mr. Toporoff asked that the Hotline suggest the caller send a formal complaint to him at the following address:

Mr. Steve Toporoff
Federal Trade Commission
Division of Marketing Practices
6th Street and Pennsylvania Ave., N.W.
Washington, D.C. 20580
(202) 326-3135