

# Fraudulent Green

What do you do when your competitors verify their own homes to their own made-up standards?



By [Michael Chandler](#) | March 9, 2010

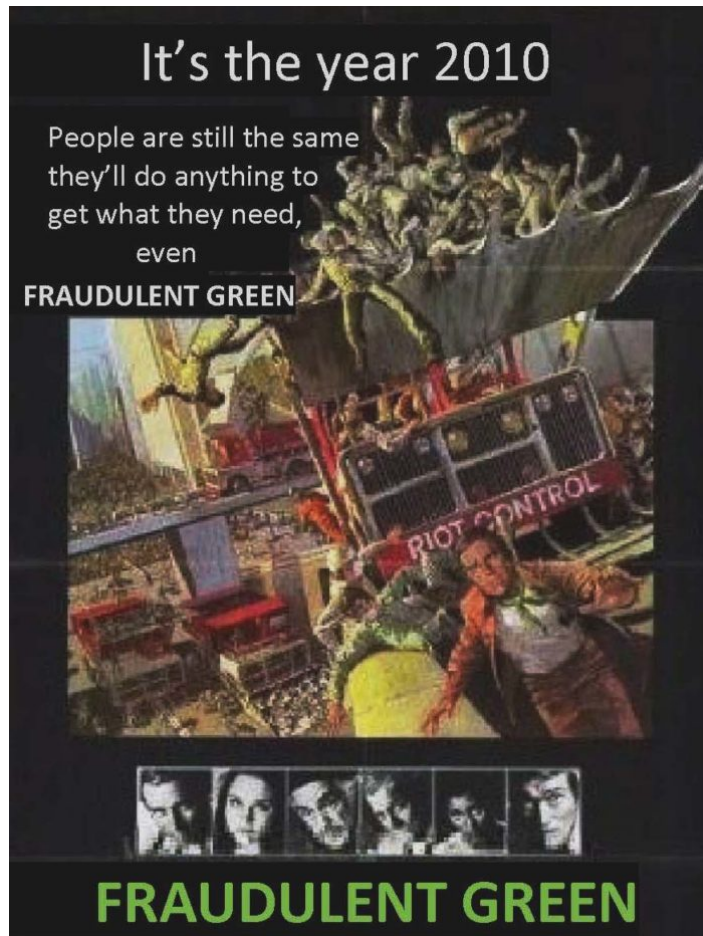


Image Credit: Michael Chandler (from old poster for the movie Soylent Green)

Until recently, I hadn't really given much thought to the builders in my town with the green leaves on their signs and the logos — “We were green before it was a color” or “Green since 1978” — who never show up at the green council meetings and won't even certify to Energy Star because “it's too expensive.” I was there once, belligerently misinformed, so I figure I can afford to turn the other cheek when I drive past a greenwasher's sign on the street.

But this new economy has made those pretty signs and press releases a little less amusing. A recent article in *Professional Builder* magazine entitled [“Does Green Help Sell Homes?”](#) by David Barista included a chart that listed the response to the question, “Of the green homes built by your company in 2009, what percentage were/will be certified as green or high-performance through each of the following programs?” The results: Energy Star had 47%, LEED for Homes had 6%, NAHB Green had 10%, local HBA green programs had 12%, and **“Your company’s internal program” had 21%!**

That’s sort of like what the Olympics would be if 21% of the athletes **hired their own judges and scored by their own private scoring system**. Or, if 21% of the builders in your town paid to use their own inspectors and code books.

So I asked around at the green building council “networking event” down at the pub and a couple of guys let me know that they were frustrated with having to compete with a “private label green builder” who was taking shortcuts and over-promising about cheap energy improvements — someone who not only made up his own rating system, but also owns the company that verifies his system for his houses and remodel projects and lies about being certified by Energy Star and NAHB to boot.

This guy’s promising on his website that “with just a few simple things we can get a house to increase its efficiency twenty, thirty, forty percent, pretty easy, and at a low cost... Within four or five years the owners will pretty much have paid for any improvements...” Which sounds just a little too good to be true - and puts honest and realistic weatherization contractors at a serious disadvantage.

Still, the website looks sort of kosher because it claims that their program manager “is a National Association of Home Builders Green Home Verifier and Home Energy Rating System HERS Rater.” Except — he isn’t. I checked [NAHB’s website](#) and [Energy Star’s](#) and they both came up empty, so I left a comment for [NAHB](#) and [Energy Star](#) suggesting that they might want to check out this guy’s website and follow up on these claims.

I think the Olympics are more fun when the judges share the same rule book and don’t take a paycheck from the people they’re scoring. But more importantly, I think we all need to pull together and support the major

national and regional green building standards. The economy has dealt our industry a major blow and a lot of the cut-rate low-ballers have put themselves out of business. Competition is tough and the time for turning the other cheek with greenwashers is over.

As things pick up we have an opportunity to pull the best and most well run businesses together to lift the standards of our industry. Let's get behind continuing improvement and builder education with shared standards and real third-party verification. It's time to make meaningful change in the way America builds and renovates homes.