

It starts when I get an irritating feeling I've been hearing a word or phrase too many times, and in too many (and sometimes inappropriate) ways. I check the calendar, and sure enough, it's time for the release of the annual Lake Superior State University Banished Words List. The 2011 list, is, as always, a wonderful compendium of "mis-use, over-use and general uselessness."

The word that has me reaching for the antacid lately is "horrific." As an adjective, it has traditionally been used to describe the worst of the worst. The word's overuse dilutes its power. Yes, accidents and crimes, natural disasters are terrible tragedies, but why does every instance of unfortunate circumstances require its description as being "horrific?" Count how many times you've read or heard the adjective used in the past year.

Another word that can give me neck pain is "iconic." Now, count how many times you've heard that term used to describe everyone from Marilyn Monroe to Captain Kangaroo, and a whole slew of inanimate objects, as well. This word was actually included in LSSU's list of banished words a couple of years ago, but apparently not enough people got the message. I'll quote from the list:

"Everyone and everything cannot be 'iconic.' Can't we switch to 'legendary' or 'famous for?'...it seems everyone in show business is 'iconic' for some reason or another...it's becoming the new 'awesome'—overused to the point where everything from a fast-food restaurant chain to a celebrity."

Some of the other gems from the 2011 list include:

'Epic' has become a term of epic annoyance. 'Back Story,' 'BFF,' 'man up' (comment being, it's a stupid term when directed at men; even more stupid when directed at a woman), 'refudiate' (um, it's repudiate—did someone's spell-checker not work?), 'I'm just sayin', and 'the American people'—aren't all Americans people?

In a similar vein, a recent AARP newsletter listed 50 new words that have become bona fide entries in top dictionaries. Words like 'automagically,' 'bargainous,' 'staycation,' 'toxic debt' and 'viral' have made it into our contemporary lexicon.

If you have a word or term that makes your vertebrae vibrate with annoyance, you can submit it to LSSU on their website, along with your reason for nominating it to utter banishment. Enjoy!

--Marian Volek