

GREENWASHING

Often businesses want to sell you a product and they use a “green” or environmental message to encourage you to buy their product. **Greenwashing** is when a company does **not** have a sustainable product, but they use a positive environmental message to sell their product.

There are five common greenwashing **sins**:

1. The sin of the **hidden trade-off** : A claim suggesting that a product is green based on a small set of attributes without attention to other important environmental issues.

Ex. Paper – single use item. The greenhouse gas emissions used to create the paper product or chlorine used in bleaching is why this option might not be as environmentally friendly as advertisers would have you believe.

2. The sin of **no proof** an environmental claim not backed by easily accessible supporting information or by a reliable third-party certification.

Ex. Facial tissue or toilet paper products that claim various percentages of post-consumer recycled content without evidence.

3. The sin of **vagueness** A claim that is so poorly defined or broad that its real meaning is likely to be misunderstood or misleading to the consumer.

Ex. All natural. There are some ‘all natural’ products that are considered dangerous/poisonous like arsenic, uranium, mercury and formaldehyde.

4. The sin of **irrelevance** An environmental claim that may be truthful but is unimportant or unhelpful.

Ex. For example, when meat companies in Canada make claims like “raised without added hormones” or “hormone free” for their chicken to make themselves seem healthy and eco-friendly even though raising chickens with added hormones has been banned in Canada since the 60s.



5. Sin of the **lesser of two evils** A claim that may be true within the product category but that risks distracting the consumer from the greater environmental impacts of the category as a whole.

Ex. Organic cigarettes or fuel-efficient sport-utility vehicles could be examples of this sin.

Here are some words and phrases to look out for:

- **Natural** - Cyanide, arsenic and asbestos are natural - trace amounts will kill you.
- **Organic** - A buzz word that means nothing unless it's *certified* organic.
- **Eco-friendly** - Being friendly to the environment? This statement carries no weight.
- **Eco & Bio** - 'Eco' and 'Bio' ranges of products are just a name, double-check that they're actually better for the environment.
- **Green** - Going or being green is another hype word that lacks substance.
- **Sustainable** - This word has a strained relationship with regards to environmental conservation.
- **x% biodegradable** - A product is either completely biodegradable within a human lifetime or it is not. Anything else is hype.

None of these words or statements are regulated by bodies or government.

What are the sins of the following ads?

1.



2.

We're beauty, pure and simple.



Ogx
beauty pure and simple

3. Ad after Enbridge pipeline oil spill contaminated 32 miles of the Kalamazoo River (2010).

