

10 KINDS OF GREENWASHING

AND HOW TO AVOID THEM

A framework for your company's sustainability statements and actions

[Learn more in the NBS article](#)

1 VAGUENESS

Making broad or poorly defined claims.

Avoid unclear terms ("green," "eco-friendly") and support claims with evidence, e.g. sources or 3rd party review

State whether claims refer to part or all of product

2 MISLEADING SYMBOLS

Visuals exaggerate organization's greenness.

Ensure visuals and symbols represent degree of sustainability impact. Consider combined effect of colors, pictures, icons, sounds, and layout; be sure it doesn't exaggerate your claims

3 JARGON

Information can't be understood by customers.

Explain claims or actions using language that consumers can easily understand.

4 NO PROOF

Supporting information is hard to find.

Verify claims with strong, independent, easily accessible evidence

5 POLITICAL SPIN

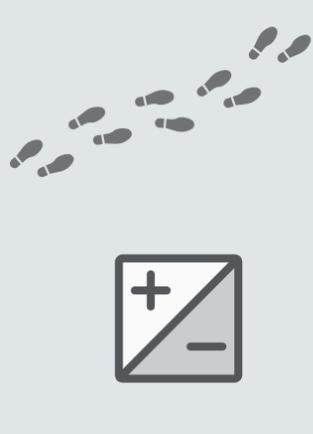
Boasting green commitments while lobbying against environmental laws.

Avoid lobbying to weaken or block environmental laws

Don't affiliate with thinktanks, trade associations and other groups that spread sustainability disinformation

6 SELECTIVE DISCLOSURE

Emphasizing a few points instead of full sustainability impact. 

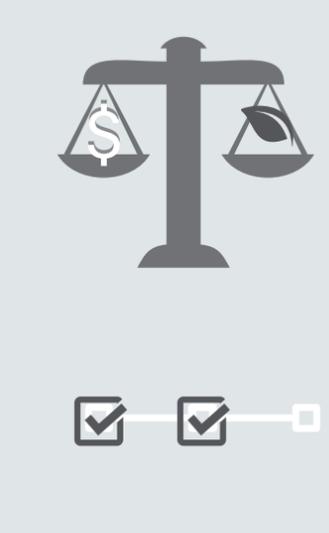


Assess sustainability footprint using all life cycle stages (including material production and end-of-life disposal).

Share all information about social and environmental performance claimed, including limits or negative impacts: Transparency improves trust and helps you get ahead of public criticism

7 EMPTY STATEMENTS

Exaggerating achievements and policies.



Only promise improvements you plan to achieve. Don't overstate commitments or spotlight minor actions

Spend more on achieving a goal than on marketing it

With net zero claims, take real action: set emissions targets to eliminate fossil fuel use, publish interim targets, and don't rely on offsets

8 INCONSISTENT ORGANIZATIONAL PRACTICE

Acting environmentally in some arenas but not others.



Make sure green claims reflect sustainability focus across the entire organization (products; practices; vision)

9 DUBIOUS CERTIFICATIONS/LABELS

Using voluntary certifications that don't genuinely drive action. 



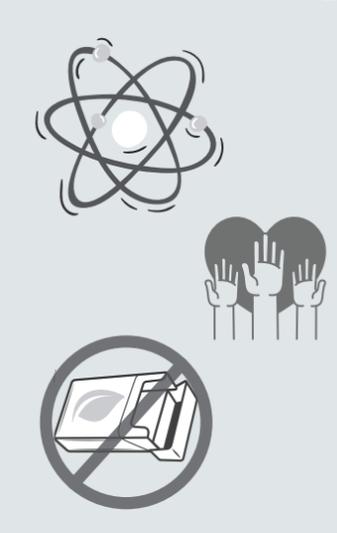
Only apply seals/labels verified by an independent body

Only use certifications that are transparent about their scope and inspections; ensure rigorous enforcement of standards and adequate complaint and objection procedures

Conduct regular due diligence to make sure claims are genuine

10 LIES AND IRRELEVANCIES

Misleading and missing the big picture.



Make sure messaging represents scientific consensus (e.g. on climate change)

Clearly communicate whether action is voluntary vs. required

Avoid making the public feel "green" about a choice that's dangerous (e.g. "greener" cigarettes) or highly controversial (e.g. natural gas)

The original framework (Nemes et al., 2022) includes the role of NGOs, governments, auditors, and other actors. This version focuses on what businesses can do.