

What is Greenwashing and Why You Should Care?

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You wake up and go to Starbucks for your daily coffee, making sure to skip out on the straws. Next you decide to do some shopping because you need some new clothes. You remember H&M just released a sustainable more “conscious” fashion line so you decide to buy a few t-shirts. Finally, you end your day with some grocery shopping. Looking around for the ingredients needed for tonight's dinner you notice green labels like “100% natural” and “eco-friendly”. Suddenly you think to yourself how far we have come as to being more environmentally conscious. It also makes you happy that huge corporations are finally caring about our environment, taking climate change seriously and acting on it.

But what if I told you that these corporations are not actually doing anything to help with climate change and that those green labels companies are using aren't necessarily accurate? The truth is, all these companies care about, as usual, is money and they are using “greenwashing” to make more money.

So What Does Greenwashing Mean?

Greenwashing began to rise in the late 1980s. Without any labeling standards, industries were able to make false claims about their products. So consumers could not tell whether these products were truly benefitting our planet. This also led to consumers paying more for

misrepresented products. This greenwashing marketing strategy is still used by companies and organizations to portray themselves as eco-friendly. Again, making people believe that the company is doing more for the environment than it really is.

Why is Greenwashing Bad?

Movements like going green and buying green are becoming more mainstream, since we as consumers have become aware of how harmful our spending is on the environment. This has led to more products claiming to be “sustainable” and “100% natural” and more. Though this should be considered an amazing step forward for the future of our planet, unfortunately companies are taking advantage of this green movement.

Greenwashing is in fact illegal, due to the misleading claims companies make which is why they face tremendous backlash when caught. Companies often make claims such as their products will begin to be 100% recyclable or that they will reduce the amount of plastic used by this year. However, these claims end up being false and plans on becoming more sustainable are often vague. Companies, especially clothing companies, will also have “sustainable” items overpriced in order to make more money and maintain a good image.

What Companies Have Been Caught greenwashing?

As previously mentioned, greenwashing is illegal. However there are still instances where companies have been caught greenwashing. Greenwashing has been found in a variety of companies dealing with everything from cars to clothes and food. The following is a list of just a few companies caught greenwashing.

[Coca-Cola:](#)

In 2021, the environmental organization Earth Island Institute filed a lawsuit against Coca-Cola. The lawsuit was filed due to the false advertising that Coca-Cola made, claiming that they were sustainable and environmentally friendly. But, Coca-Cola is actually the largest plastic polluter in the world, according to [Break Free From Plastic's 2020 annual report](#).

[Nestle:](#)

Nestle released a statement in 2018 stating that it aims to have all its packaging 100% recyclable or reusable by 2025. However, this statement quickly received backlash from environmental groups as the statement was rather vague on how exactly this would be done. Nestle was also found to be one of the world's top plastic polluters along with Coca-Cola in the same report mentioned above.

[ExxonMobil:](#)

After advertising that its experimental algae biofuels could reduce transport emissions one day ExxonMobil was accused of greenwashing. This is because its 2025 emission reduction targets do not include the vast majority of emissions that resulted from their products.

[H&M:](#)

H&M is just one of many fast fashion brands that have been guilty of greenwashing. The fashion industry is said to be responsible for [10% of annual global carbon emissions](#) and fast fashion only makes this worse. H&M like many other clothing brands have claimed that they are eco-friendly and their clothing is sustainable but these are just marketing tactics.

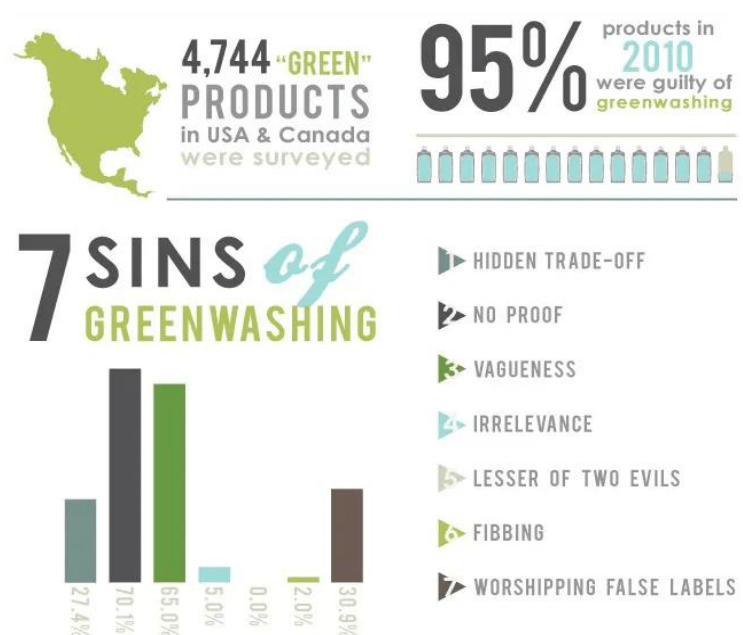
It is important to do your research and be weary when a company is making a claim that seems too good to be true.

How Can You Identify When a Company is Greenwashing?

Identifying greenwashing isn't easy, so we as consumers are often left to just trust that the companies we buy from are actually doing what they say. Though greenwashing is done very subtly there are ways of telling when a company is guilty of greenwashing. Labels like "eco-friendly", "non-toxic" and "sustainable" are often giveaways of greenwashing because of the lack of substance. But, there are 7 things you should especially look for and it has been termed "The 7 Sins of Greenwashing" and in fact 90% of products in stores commit one of the 7 sins of greenwashing according to a [2010 study by TerraChoice](#).

What are ["The Seven Sins of Greenwashing"](#)?

1. Sin of Hidden Trade-offs
 - a. committed by suggesting a product is "green" based on an unreasonably narrow set of attributes without attention to other important environmental issues
2. Sin of No Proof
 - a. Committed when companies self-proclaim to be environmentally friendly even



though they have no factual proof of what they claim.

3. Sin of Vagueness
 - a. Committed when a claim is poorly defined or broad and is misleading a consumer (e.g., “all-natural”).
4. Sin of Irrelevance
 - a. Committed by making an environmental claim that may be truthful but is unimportant or unhelpful for consumers seeking environmentally preferable products.
5. Sin of Lesser of Two Evils
 - a. Committed by claims that may be true within the product category, but that risk distracting the consumer from the greater health or environmental impacts of the category as a whole.
6. Sin of Fibbing
 - a. Committed by making environmental claims that are simply false.
7. Sin of Worshipping False Labels
 - a. Committed when a company takes advantage of the consumer's lack of knowledge of actual environmental certifications.

What labels can you actually trust?



To avoid greenwashing make sure to find products with a few national and international agencies that have legitimate environmental certifications. Some legitimate certifications to look for include, USDA Certified Organic, Vegan Energy Star Certified, Green Seal Certified, etc. Again it is important to do your research on any product that claims to be eco-friendly. But, if a product contains a label that you do not recognize or has a claim that can't be exactly proven it is best to steer away from it.

Moving forward, try to look for signs of greenwashing on products you would typically buy, you might just be surprised. Also, make sure to tell friends and family about greenwashing and help limit the consumption of false environmental advertisements.

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