



# What Is “Greenwashing”?

## More About Showing What’s Inside

### Additional Activity

Approximately 10-15 minutes.

With larger groups, this can go up to a half hour by expanding the search for products throughout the store.

### Objective

- To help advocates recognize signs of greenwashing in a way that is objective and non-judgmental, so they can be assured that they are making correct purchasing decisions.

### Preparation




- To help advocates recognize signs of greenwashing in a way that is objective and non-judgmental, so they can be assured that they are making correct purchasing decisions.

**Note:** As much as possible have participants identify products during the activity. Don’t put yourself in the position of saying that a product claim is false, but point out if and when the claims made don’t appear to be supported by the information on the label.


### Facilitation Tip

The “scavenger hunt” through the store to find examples can also be used as an in-store game for retailers that host school and church groups, clubs, etc.

### Icons

-  Ask the group
-  Emphasize this key point
-  Transition

## ACTIVITY FACILITATION

-  We talked about the term “greenwashing.” Who can explain it in their own words?

Allow participants to answer.

-  Why do companies do this?


- To boost sales—manufacturers know that a green image is increasingly desirable for many customers.

-  Why is this effective?

- Because people want to believe that they are using products that are safe for themselves, their family, and the environment. Unfortunately, most people don’t have the time or inclination to do deeper research on the truthfulness and transparency of corporate claims.

-  How does greenwashing affect consumers? What is the impact?

- Greenwashing misleads them
- It makes it more difficult for them to find products that fulfill their needs or wishes

-  **Greenwashing can mean different things. Because there are no regulations or standards around many of the claims that come under “greenwashing,” there’s a lot of “wiggle room” for manufacturers to make claims.**

Futerra Sustainability Communications, a marketing communications firm based in London and New York, has identified ten signs that you can use to tell whether or not a “green” claim is valid:

- 1. Fluffy language**  
Words or terms with no clear meaning
- 2. Green products, dirty company**  
“Eco-friendly” products from a company whose major business is anything but
- 3. Suggestive pictures**  
Green images that imply an unjustified green impact (such as Pure essentials from P&G)

#### 4. Irrelevant claims

Emphasizing one minor green attribute of a product or company, when everything else about it is un-green

#### 5. Best in class

Declaring that a product or company is slightly better than the rest when the rest are all pretty terrible (such as auto manufacturers, pure essentials, etc.)

#### 6. Just not credible

Greening a product that's inherently harmful, like "eco friendly" cigarettes

#### 7. Gobbledygook

Jargon or information that only a scientist can understand

#### 8. Imaginary friends

"Third party" endorsements from organizations that have no reliable standards and may be made up or paid for

#### 9. No proof

No evidence for the claims, on the product label or anywhere else

#### 10. Outright lying

Fabricated claims or data

**?** Has anyone seen or heard these types of claims? With what types of products?

Allow participants to respond.

**?** Do you ever find these "green" claims to be persuasive? Why?

Allow participants to respond.

**?** If in a store aisle: Without moving from where you are right now, can you find a product that fits one of these signs of greenwashing?

See what participants come up with.

**!** Even if these claims are not deliberately misleading, because of the lack of labeling standards, consumers just can't be sure what they're getting.

**Option:** Ask participants to go on a "scavenger hunt" through the store. The group will vote for the product with the most extravagant claims or over-the-top imagery, and the person who found it can get a prize.

Facilitate additional discussion with these questions:

- Have you ever purchased a product because you thought it was natural or green, only to find out after closer examination that it wasn't?
- How did it make you feel?

**?** What are some of the things that you can do to make sure that you aren't being greenwashed?

Let participants respond. Key points include:

- Look beyond images and claims
- Check the ingredients
- Don't accept a third-party endorsement without knowing what the third party stands for
- Do some research about products on your own