

SEVEN THE ~~SIX~~ SINS OF GREENWASHING™



Green-wash (grēn'wōsh', -wōsh') – *verb*: the act of misleading consumers regarding the environmental practices of a company or the environmental benefits of a product or service.

SIN OF THE HIDDEN TRADE-OFF

A claim suggesting that a product is 'green' based on a narrow set of attributes without attention to other important environmental issues.

Example: Paper is not necessarily environmentally preferable just because it comes from a sustainably-harvested forest. Other important environmental issues in the paper-making process, such as greenhouse gas emissions, or chlorine use in bleaching may be equally important.



SIN OF IRRELEVANCE

An environmental claim that may be truthful but is unimportant or unhelpful for consumers seeking environmentally preferable products.

Example: 'CFC-free'. This is a frequent claim despite the fact that CFCs are banned by law.



SIN OF NO PROOF

An environmental claim that cannot be substantiated by easily accessible supporting information or by a reliable third-party certification.

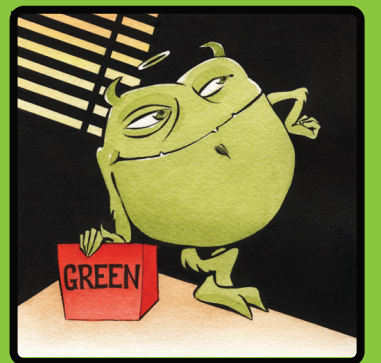
Example: Facial tissues or toilet tissue products that claim various percentages of post-consumer recycled content without providing evidence.



SIN OF FIBBING

Environmental claims that are simply false.

Example: Products falsely claiming to be Energy Star certified or registered.



SIN VAGUENESS

A claim that is so poorly defined or broad that its real meaning is likely to be misunderstood by the consumer.

Example: 'All-natural'. Arsenic, uranium, mercury, and formaldehyde are all naturally occurring, and poisonous. 'All natural' isn't necessarily 'green'.



SIN OF 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.

Example: Organic cigarettes and fuel-efficient sport-utility vehicles.



SIN OF WORSHIPPING FALSE LABELS

A product that, through either words or images, gives the impression of a third-party endorsement where no such endorsement actually exists; fake labels, in other words.

Example: Manufacturers who add their own label to a product with images and statements such as, 'this product fights global warming'.



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