

Sustainability Spotlight

Deception by Greenwashing

Have you ever picked up a product at a store and noticed on the label a company's claim to be dedicated to the environment or a statement about packaging made of sustainable materials? Did that label influence whether or not you bought the product? As consumers, we tend to support products and companies that align with our own ethical standards and beliefs. Unfortunately, the corporate sector has strategically studied marketing tactics and have turned the environmental crisis into one of capital gain. The practice of making false or misleading claims about a company's environmental practices in order to enhance mass marketing and sell more products and/or services is known as greenwashing.

According to the United Nations, *"Greenwashing presents a significant obstacle to tackling climate change. By misleading the public to believe that a company or other entity is doing more to protect the environment than it is, greenwashing promotes false solutions to the climate crisis that distract from and delay concrete and credible action."*



Image Sources: Natural Resource Defense Council & United Nations

There are many ways in which products can appear environmentally-conscious without having any credibility behind their claim:

- Nature-inspired Images – packaging that show leaves, trees, animals, and other natural scenery
- Environmental Buzzwords – labels that use “sustainable,” environmentally-friendly,” or “green”
- Overly Ambitious Climate Goals – statements promising to eliminate an unrealistic percentage of carbon or other contaminant contributing to climate change
- Celebrity Endorsements – celebrities are not scientists and should not be a factor in supporting certain products for their sustainability initiatives

While there are many companies out there who put environmental consciousness practices at the forefront of their operations, there are significantly more who exploit the environment for profit. We as the consumer must be wise enough to ask questions, do our research, and understand what each company stands for before purchasing a product or service.

Some trusted labels you should be on the lookout for while you are shopping may include the following:

Certified



This company meets the highest standards of social and environmental impact

Corporation

A [Benefit Corporation](#) (B Corp) is a type of for-profit company that seeks to balance profit with social and environmental goals. B Corps are legally required to consider the impact of their decisions not only on their shareholders but also on their workers, customers, communities, and the environment. B Corps are certified by a third-party organization, B Lab, which assesses their performance based on various social and

environmental metrics. The certification process is rigorous and requires companies to meet certain standards of transparency, accountability, and social and environmental performance. B Corps aim to use business as a force for good and contribute to a more sustainable and equitable economy.

The [Forest Stewardship Council](#) (FSC) is an international non-profit dedicated to the preservation of the world's forests. The FSC logo appears on a variety of products from greeting cards to construction materials that use responsibly sourced or recycled materials that come from trees. Some unique items that FSC labels also appear on are clothing, sports equipment, and art supplies.



The [Biodegradable Products Institute](#) (BPI) is a non-profit organization that certifies a variety of products and packaging in North America. BPI utilizes strict standards to test and certify products. BPI emphasizes the difference between compostable and biodegradable materials and the best way to dispose of them. The logo helps consumers to identify and trust that an item is compostable and can be diverted with food scraps where programs exist

For more information on greenwashing, please visit the [United Nations'](#) webpage and the article by the [Natural Resources Defense Council](#).



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