

GREENWASH MARKERS AND PREVENTION MECHANISMS

MARKER	DESCRIPTION	PREVENTION MECHANISM
VAGUENESS	Making broad or poorly defined claims.	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.
MISLEADING SYMBOLS	Visuals exaggerate organization's greenness.	Only promise improvements you plan to achieve. Don't overstate commitments or minor spotlight 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, don't rely on offsets.
JARGON	Information can't be understood by customers.	Explain claims or actions using language that consumers can easily understand.
NO PROOF	Supporting information is hard to find.	Verify claims with strong, independent, easily accessible evidence.
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.
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.
EMPTY STATEMENTS	Exaggerating achievements and policies.	Only promise improvements you plan to achieve. Don't overstate commitments or minor spotlight 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, don't rely on offsets.
INCONSISTENT ORG. PRACTICE	Acting environmentally in some arenas but not others.	Make sure green claims reflect sustainability focus across the entire organization (products; practices; vision)
DUBIOUS CERTIFICATIONS	Using voluntary certifications that don't genuinely drive action.	For those involved in ethics, compliance, and standards 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.
LIES & 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. methane).