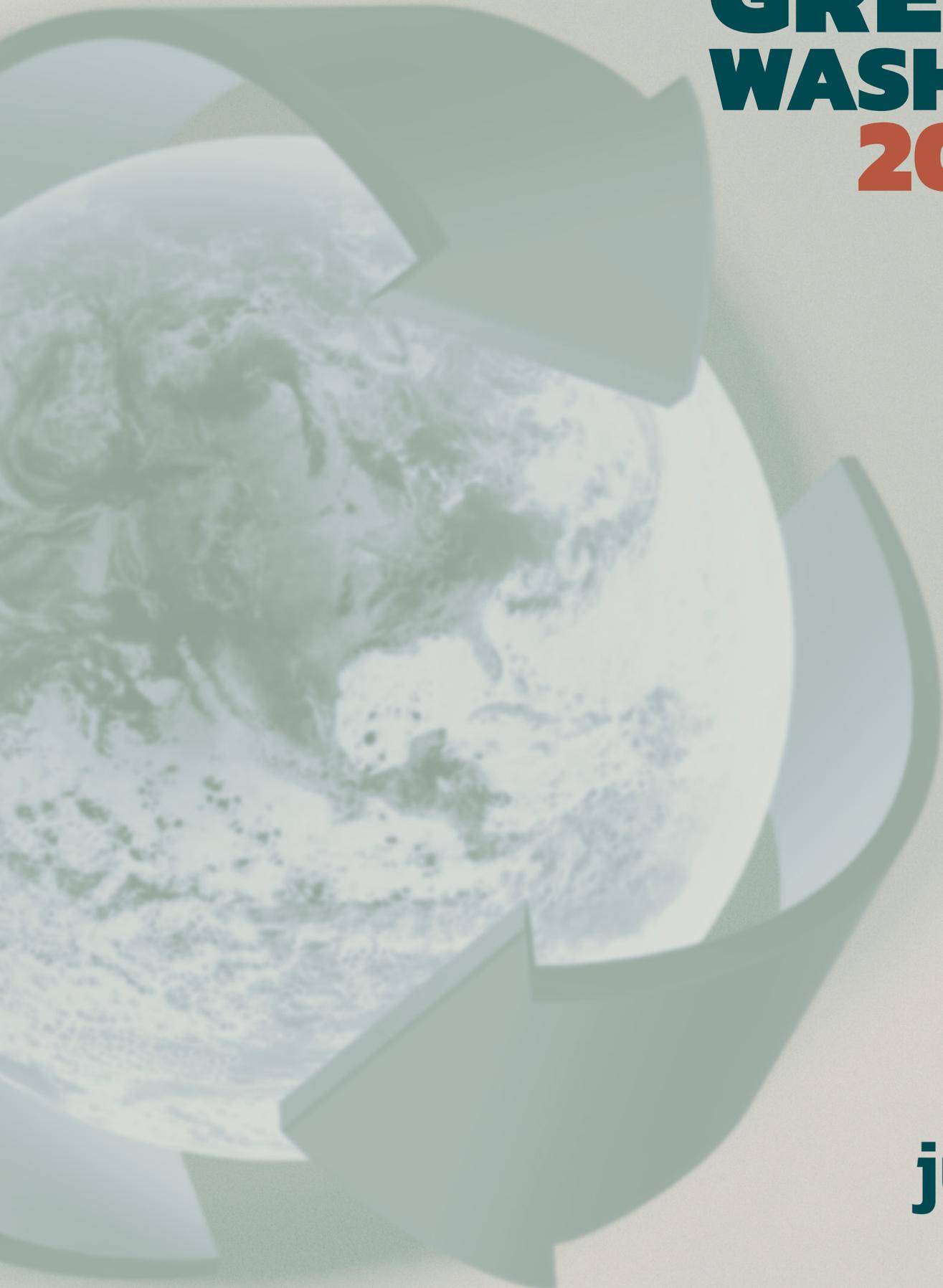


GREEN WASHED 2025



**just
zero**

INTRODUCTION

Climate change and environmental damage are no longer distant threats – they are shaping the world we live in and the legacy we leave for future generations. For many, watching the climate crisis unfold in real time has prompted action. But this is far from universal. Countless corporations still anchor their success in practices and materials that damage ecosystems, endanger public health, and burden communities.

Instead, it's individual consumers around the world who are signaling their concern by intentionally spending money in ways that align with their values. We look for products labeled “sustainable,” “eco-friendly,” or “green,” trusting that these claims reflect real responsibility. But relying on what companies tell us about themselves to make these informed decisions can be misplaced trust. Too often, businesses exaggerate their environmental commitments or discretely omit the damage their products and operations cause. This deception, known as greenwashing, not only exploits consumer trust, but has real and lasting consequences for both people and the planet.

Greenwashing Defined

“Greenwashing” is a comprehensive term used to encapsulate all the tactics used across various industries to deceive consumers or misrepresent the impact a practice or product has on the environment and public health. For the purposes of our work and this report, Just Zero defines “greenwashing” as:

green · washing

Any deception or misrepresentation by an entity, such as a company, government, institution, or individual, to make a product, practice, technology, or policy appear environmentally friendly and safe for consumers when in fact, it is not.

Many of us want to believe that companies place people and the environment at the heart of their decisions. In reality, most corporations are guided first and foremost by profit. Meaningful change rarely happens because it's the right thing to do – it only happens when the rules require it.

Around the world, governments have begun to respond by strengthening consumer protection laws designed to curb greenwashing and demand greater corporate transparency. But not all governments are equal when it comes to consumer protection. For example, the [European Union](#) takes a more precautionary approach, restricting thousands of toxic chemicals commonly used in cosmetics, toothpaste, and household cleaners. In the beauty industry alone, [more than 2,400 chemicals](#) are prohibited. In the United States? Only [11 substances](#) are banned or restricted. And this leniency extends far beyond personal care products.

If greenwashing is to be meaningfully addressed and consumers adequately protected from misinformation, stronger legislation is essential. Without laws that prioritize public health and environmental integrity, businesses will continue to exploit consumer trust, hiding harmful practices behind the appearance of sustainability.



Greenwashing Tactics

Although “greenwashing” is widely used to describe any type of deception or misrepresentation around public health and environmental claims, this broad definition makes it difficult for consumers to recognize greenwashing when they see it.

Below, we have laid out five major tactics that entities across a wide range of industries regularly use to greenwash their products, practices, technologies, or policies to help you better understand greenwashing and how to spot it.

green · crowding

The practice of avoiding accountability for environmental risks or damage by joining or “hiding” within a group of similarly positioned entities.

green · labeling

The deceptive use of environmentally friendly labels, wording, and visuals to create a false sense of ecological responsibility.

green · lighting

The selective amplification of supposed environmentally beneficial practices or projects to conceal activities that counteract those claimed benefits and cause harm to people and the planet.

green · rinsing

The pattern of retreating, abandoning, or frequently changing environmental goals without achieving them.

green · shifting

The deflection of environmental responsibility onto others, typically consumers and the public.

2025 SPOTLIGHTS

In the following spotlights, we analyze nine instances of greenwashing from 2025. Each example has a section detailing the industries involved, deceptive tactics used, and red flags to watch out for. These “greenwashing specs” are meant to help you readily identify the ways in which the environmental claims of various industries are deceptive.

CASE STUDY 00		
Entity Name		
 INDUSTRIES INVOLVED Industry	 TACTICS USED Tactic	 RED FLAGS Flag

Procter & Gamble



INDUSTRIES INVOLVED

Consumer Goods



TACTICS USED

Greenlabeling

Greenlighting



RED FLAGS

Misuses certification

Claims contradict actions

[Procter & Gamble](#) (P&G) is a multinational consumer goods company known for many brands lining home and personal care aisles at stores across the country. One of P&G's most notable brands is well recognized for its family of lovable bears who care about your tush. That's right, Charmin toilet paper. Though a seemingly humble product, Charmin toilet paper may be destroying the Canadian boreal forest – one of the world's [most important biological ecosystems](#).

P&G claims its toilet paper is sustainably sourced from responsibly managed forests through the use of Forest Stewardship Council (FSC) and Rainforest Alliance seals, as well as its self-created "[Protect-Grow-Restore](#)" logo. Yet, a January 2025 [lawsuit](#) disagrees – claiming that P&G's use of these labels is greenwashing (a **greenlabeling** tactic). P&G markets Charmin toilet paper as being 100% FSC-certified and uses the "Main FSC" logo on its packaging to showcase that. However, the lawsuit argues that [only a fraction](#) of P&G's wood pulp is sourced from FSC-certified forests. The lawsuit also notes that the Rainforest Alliance Certified™ seal used on Charmin toilet paper packaging is obsolete – having been [phased out in September 2023](#).

Publicly, P&G has made commitments to protect the environment through its "Keep Forests as Forests" campaign. But consumer-plaintiffs argue this campaign is also misleading – an example of **greenlighting** – because P&G sources most of its wood pulp for Charmin toilet paper using [detrimental logging practices](#).

SC Johnson



INDUSTRIES INVOLVED

Consumer Goods



TACTICS USED

Greencrowding

Greenlabeling

Greenshifting



RED FLAGS

Avoids accountability

Misuses recycling label

Scapegoats consumers

Whether or not you're familiar with the multinational corporation [SC Johnson](#), which makes and sells several household cleaning products and consumer chemicals, you likely know one of the company's most universal products – the [Ziploc](#) bag. SC Johnson has made several claims that its Ziploc bags are safe and recyclable. But as more studies emphasize the dangers of plastic, Ziploc bags have come under scrutiny.

In September 2025, Philadelphia filed a [lawsuit](#) against SC Johnson and Bimbo Baking Co. claiming the companies misled consumers by deceptively advertising their single-use plastic bags as recyclable – an example of **greenlabeling**. These bags are made of “plastic film” which are [notoriously difficult](#) to recycle and [often aren't](#) accepted in recycling programs.

The lawsuit also calls out how SC Johnson and other companies rely on the How2Recycle labeling system to facilitate their deception. [How2Recycle](#), developed by the nonprofit organization GreenBlue, is a standardized labeling system intended to help consumers manage waste. Companies pay to license these labels and place them on their products to indicate whether they are recyclable and, if so, how to recycle them.

While How2Recycle aims to reduce consumer confusion, some of its labels - particularly “store drop-off” (which appear on Ziploc bag packaging) and “check locally”- have become vehicles for **greenshifting** and **greencrowding**. These labels shift responsibility onto consumers by requiring them to determine whether recycling programs exist in their communities. They also prop up the illusion that plastic film recycling systems are effective and widely available. In reality, these programs are [extremely limited and intentionally confusing](#). Even when plastic film is accepted at retail drop-off locations, it almost always [ends up in landfills or incinerators](#).

Similarly, in April 2025, SC Johnson [was sued](#) for misleading consumers by marketing its plastic food storage products as “microwave-safe” and “freezer” safe. As the class action complaint explains, mounting research indicates that microwaving or freezing plastic materials releases microplastic and nanoplastic particles. These particles are now being found in many parts of the human body and can even infiltrate cells – exposing people to several adverse health effects such as cancer, reproductive issues, and organ disruptions. Clearly, SC Johnson is no stranger to labels that give consumers a false sense of security.

CASE STUDY 03

Reynolds Consumer Products



INDUSTRIES INVOLVED

Consumer Goods



TACTICS USED

Greenlabeling



RED FLAGS

Misuses recycling label

Persistent misconduct

Last year, in our [Greenwashed 2024](#) report, we highlighted an example of greenlabeling by [Reynolds Consumer Products](#), an American manufacturer of household goods. That example focused on a Minnesota lawsuit which argued the company committed consumer fraud and deception by labeling their plastic [Hefty Recycling bags](#) as “recycling bags.”

In August 2025, Arizona [sued](#) Reynolds Consumer Products for the same bags at issue in the Minnesota lawsuit highlighted last year, claiming these “recycling bags” mislead consumers. Regardless of last year’s lawsuit, Reynolds seems to be doubling down on its **greenlabeling** tactics. The company continues to market the bags for recycling, stating they are “ideal for collecting recyclable materials,” while also using the bag color (clear and blue) as a way to signal its use for recycling. As Arizona’s complaint explains, these bags contribute to the contamination of the state’s recycling streams and reroute what would otherwise be recycled material to landfills.

PepsiCo



INDUSTRIES INVOLVED

Food and Beverage



TACTICS USED

Greenrinsing



RED FLAGS

Broken promises

Goal abandonment

Pattern of deception

This multinational corporation is the second-largest food and beverage business in the world. [PepsiCo](#) sells 23 well-known drink and snack brands, much of which is packaged in single-use plastic. So, it's not surprising that PepsiCo continues to be one of the [top global plastic polluters](#). The company seemingly acknowledged its role in the plastic pollution crisis, having made [several sustainability promises](#). Those promises included delivering 20% of beverages through reusable models by 2030, reducing absolute tonnage of new plastic from fossil fuels by 20% by 2030, and designing packaging that is 100% recyclable, compostable, or reusable by 2025.

But these promises are just a disingenuous fad – and not only for PepsiCo. Many beverage giants are now backtracking on their previous sustainability goals. Like its lead competitor – Coca-Cola, which was highlighted in last year's Greenwashed 2024 report – PepsiCo has also [pulled back on its sustainability commitments](#). In a May 2025 press release, the company reworked its targets and even cancelled some altogether, including its reuse goals – a prime **greenrinsing** tactic.



NYC Curbside “Composting” Program



INDUSTRIES INVOLVED

Government



TACTICS USED

Greenlabeling

Greenlighting



RED FLAGS

Conceals information

Misrepresents compost

New York City – the largest city in the United States – is revisiting its [solid waste management plan](#). A city’s solid waste management plan is important because it gives a detailed account of its strategy for managing trash and recyclables through waste reduction, recycling, reuse, collection, transport, and disposal. Cities must periodically revisit and update their plan. Your community may also have a plan in place – this is a great way to get involved in improving the waste system in your community.

New York published a draft of its updated plan in 2025, outlining many ambitious goals and strategies. Some of these goals and strategies are a step in the right direction, but one stood out as particularly problematic: where the city’s food waste goes.

NYC rolled out curbside organic waste collection between 2024-2025 and began enforcing [mandatory collection in 2025](#). However, [only 20%](#) of the food scraps and yard waste collected from the curb is actually being composted. The rest is sent to wastewater treatment plants where it’s co-digested (mixed) with [sewage sludge](#) – a material swarming with toxic compounds and chemicals, like PFAS and microplastics, that are unsafe for humans.

The city’s **greenlabeling** push to collect food waste through mandatory curbside collection is misleading residents into thinking their effort to separate food scraps from trash is worthwhile because it reduces waste and helps the environment. But, as the draft plan shows, the city intends to aggressively pursue co-digestion of food scraps with sludge using the **greenlighting** guise that this diverts food from landfills. All the while, remaining silent on how toxic sludge is and how it will forever destroy any beneficial use of food scraps.



CASE STUDY 06

Tyson Foods and JBS USA



INDUSTRIES INVOLVED

Agriculture

Food and Beverage



TACTICS USED

Greenlabeling



RED FLAGS

Claims contradict actions

Flawed metrics

Uses fossil fuel playbook

Tyson Foods, a multinational corporation, is the world's second-largest meat company (and the U.S.'s largest). JBS takes first as the largest meat producer in the world. The animals for this meat are raised in large-scale industrial operations – factory farms – which produce a large volume of waste (and have a history of poor and unsafe working conditions, as well as unethical animal production practices).

In 2012, factory farms produced an estimated 13 times more sewage than the entire U.S. population. Many factory farms collect this waste in lagoons – open-air pits that contain urine, blood, feces, pathogens, pharmaceuticals and heavy metals, and can sometimes be unlined. Unsurprisingly, the waste in these lagoons is toxic and contaminates waterways. The toxicity of these factory farms is especially detrimental to nearby communities, which are often disproportionally people of color and low-income communities.

Factory farming practices are also responsible for a third of global greenhouse gas emissions – a major contributor to climate change and extreme weather. With this growing awareness, many consumers have attempted to reduce their environmental impact by being more selective while grocery shopping. The more shoppers give up meat or choose brands with better

farming practices, the more it hurts factory farm brands' bottom lines. Needless to say, the industrial farming industry is trying to sway shoppers from the truth. Enter: greenwashing tactics to [dissuade shoppers](#) from eating less meat.

In 2025, environmental and animal rights groups won a [settlement](#) in a lawsuit against Tyson. The [complaint](#) alleged that Tyson made false and misleading marketing claims by advertising a baseless pledge to achieve “net-zero” climate emissions by 2050 and by marketing “climate-smart” beef – an example of **greenlabeling**. In reality, Tyson and four other industrial protein producers [emitted more greenhouse gas](#) than fossil fuel companies Chevron, Shell, or BP in 2023. Now, under the settlement, Tyson must stop making any climate claims unless the company can provide evidence to prove the claims are true.

Similarly, JBS USA advertised claims that it would achieve net zero greenhouse gas emissions by 2040 despite any real evidence or plans to do so. New York called their bluff and filed a [lawsuit](#) alleging that this “Net Zero by 2040” campaign misled climate-conscious consumers about its practices. In 2025, New York reached a [settlement](#) with the company winning \$1.1 million to support climate-smart programs for New York farmers and a revision of its “Net Zero by 2040” advertising language.



Reworld



INDUSTRIES INVOLVED

Waste Management



TACTICS USED

Greenlabeling

Greenlighting

Greenshifting



RED FLAGS

Co-opts green terms

Performative partnerships

Redirects harm

Reworld, formerly Covanta, is a private waste management company that owns and operates incinerators across the eastern half of the United States. Incineration is a waste management method that burns trash and sometimes uses the output of that process to produce fuel and electricity. But burning trash comes with a myriad of adverse health effects on local communities and surrounding areas that are disproportionately communities of color and/or low-income households. To distract us from this, waste management companies pose incineration as “renewable waste-to-energy.” The problem with that messaging? Burning trash is an expensive scam that’s far from producing clean energy. Reworld has a history of **greenlabeling** by reframing waste incineration. This is especially true of its Delaware Valley Resource Recovery facility in Chester, Pennsylvania, just outside Philadelphia.

For years, the company has claimed this facility is “sustainable,” focusing the narrative on its role in diverting waste from landfills. This **greenshifting** tactic aims to deflect from the problems with incineration by putting the onus on landfills. But both waste management practices are toxic, outdated, and unsustainable.

Fortunately, Philadelphia has seen through the lies and is seeking to stop Reworld by passing the “Stop Trashing Our Air Act,” which would ban incineration of its waste. The city currently generates roughly one-third of the trash burned at the Reworld facility. Reworld has predictably come out against this bill. In both testimony and public comment, the company has doubled down on its greenwashing messaging of being “sustainable.” And, in an attempt to shift the focus away from its polluting activity, Reworld uses **greenlighting** to highlight its minor community projects and partnerships with environmental justice groups.

W.L. Gore & Associates



INDUSTRIES INVOLVED

Fashion

Textile



TACTICS USED

Greenlabeling



RED FLAGS

Conceals harm

Deviates from norms

W.L. Gore & Associates is a multinational manufacturer of products derived from fluouropolymers (a type of plastic) and are best known for their GORE-TEX fabric. This premium, breathable, waterproof fabric is used in expensive outdoor gear. Though the company markets its products as high-quality and innovative to earn their premium cost, being expensive doesn't necessarily mean it's safe.

Where there is plastic, chemicals, and "waterproof" qualities, PFAS is generally involved. Per- and polyfluoroalkyl substances (PFAS) – also known as "forever chemicals" because they do not break down in the environment – are harmful to human health and the environment. Some known risks to human health include immune system disfunction and cancer.

Sure enough, W.L. Gore & Associates is facing several lawsuits, with one filed most recently in June 2025, concerning the health and environmental safety of its products and production. The complaints center around the company's failure to disclose the presence of PFAS, deviating from common definitions about the chemical makeup of its materials, and using misleading tactics like **greenlabeling** to persuade customers to purchase their premium "environmentally sound" and "responsible performance" breathable waterproof products.



CASE STUDY 09

Nike, Lacoste, Superdry



INDUSTRIES INVOLVED

Fashion

Textile



TACTICS USED

Greenlabeling



RED FLAGS

Baseless claims

[Nike](#) (the largest athletic footwear and apparel company that has also been identified as using [sweatshops](#) and other unethical labor practices), [Lacoste](#) (a French sports fashion company), and [Superdry](#) (a British clothing company) all share something beyond their industry: **greenlabeling** marketing tactics. Each year, the fashion industry contributes an estimated [8-10% in global emissions](#). Although many fashion companies market themselves as “sustainable,” these claims rightly come into question, as was the case for Nike, Lacoste, and Superdry.

In December 2025, the UK Advertising Standards Authority (ASA) – an independent watchdog regulator of advertising across all media in the United Kingdom – [ruled](#) that all three fashion companies misled consumers about their claims of environmental sustainability. The companies ran paid-for Google ads using terms like “sustainable,” “sustainable materials,” or “sustainable style” without sufficient evidence to back up these claims. The ASA requires environmental claims to be “supported by a high level of substantiation” (evidence), which none of these companies provided. These ads are now banned in the UK unless the companies can prove their sustainability claims.

WHAT CAN YOU DO?

When corporations chase higher profits by dressing up harmful practices as “sustainable,” it’s easy to feel small and powerless as consumers. That feeling is valid but also deceptive. Real influence doesn’t sit solely in boardrooms – it lives in our collective choices.

Every dollar we spend, every conversation we spark, every demand for stronger regulation, and every effort to use legal channels sends a signal. When we act together with intention, we shift from passive buyers to active participants, capable of holding companies accountable and reshaping the marketplace.

If we want to challenge greenwashing, the first step is learning to recognize it. Companies may blur the truth with vague promises and polished marketing, but we are not without tools. By sharpening our ability to question claims, examine labels, and look beyond surface-level messaging, we equip ourselves with skills to judge products and practices on substance rather than spin. Knowledge changes everything – it allows us to make deliberate choices about what we buy, who we support, what we speak up about, and when we take action.



Tips for Spotting Greenwashing

Green Imagery

Does the product or entity use nature-based imagery or colors in its marketing?

Environmentally minded consumers may gravitate toward products that appear eco-conscious. For instance, automobile companies [routinely showcase](#) their gas-powered vehicles in pristine natural settings, creating false environmental associations. Don't fall for it! Seek out concrete details about the company or product to assess its true environmental footprint.

Buzz Words

Does the product or entity use environmental buzz words?

Companies constantly use words like “sustainable” or “eco-friendly” or “green” to appeal to climate-conscious shoppers. Yet these terms are meaningless without substantive proof backing them up. Before accepting these buzzwords as fact, investigate the company or product further.

Certification Labels

Does the product or entity have any third-party certifications?

Exercise caution when a product has [certification labels](#)! Some third-party certifications originate from industry groups to promote their own interests. Sadly, this means you'll need to do more digging using reliable sources as research to determine which certifications are truly impartial and mean that a product has genuinely minimized its environmental harm.

Suspicious Claims

Does the product or entity sound too good to be true?

When a sustainability claim sounds unrealistic, it probably is! Follow your instincts. Companies that obscure how they arrived at their environmental claims and lack transparency about their operations may be (at best) misguided or (at worst) deliberately lying.

Limited Data

Is the product or entity website sparse on data and information about processes?

Companies that shy away from hard data or information about their business process likely don't feel comfortable sharing for a reason. Transparency on where it sources its materials from and its impact on the environment (like emissions data) shows a level of honesty that many companies aren't willing to risk. Companies that do share this information also show they are willing to spend resources on tracking that information, which is a green flag.

Spread the Word

Choosing not to support companies whose values clash with your own is a powerful first step – but it doesn't have to end there. You can go beyond silent resistance by making your voice heard. Write to corporations. Sign and circulate petitions. Use social media not just to scroll, but to raise awareness. When you uncover greenwashing, don't keep it to yourself – share what you've learned with your online circles and within your local community. Awareness grows through conversation, and conversation is often where accountability begins.

Support Truth in Labeling Laws

We can also fight greenwashing through [stricter laws](#) that mandate corporate honesty and transparency regarding environmental impacts and claims. For instance, while many products currently display the familiar chasing arrows symbol, a number of these items [aren't actually recyclable](#) in most areas. Similar confusion surrounds products marketed as "[compostable](#)."

Federal Truth in Labeling legislation would help give consumers accurate and clear information about how to dispose of products. States can also pass Truth in Labeling laws to safeguard their residents. For example, in this legislative session, New Jersey is [considering a bill](#) that bans companies from labeling or marketing their products as recyclable unless New Jersey's environmental department determines that the products are widely recyclable in the state. Providing support for this bill via [testimony](#) during hearings (even if you don't live in New Jersey!), or calling your state representatives to urge support is a great way to move strong laws forward.

Another accountability mechanism involves pressuring the United States Federal Trade Commission (FTC) to revise its "[Green Guides](#)." The Green Guides establish standards for how companies can market or label products as environmentally friendly, including recyclability claims. The Green Guides aim to prevent misleading advertising, but currently they are [ineffective](#) and need updating. Strengthening the Guides would better align current corporate practices with modern environmental standards and consumer expectations.



Oppose Weak Industry Backed Bills

Many industry representatives also participate in our system of government by pushing forward laws that will weaken environmental goals in order to gain more company profit. Calling your representatives to oppose these bills is also a critical step towards combatting greenwashing and supporting your values.

This year, one of the industry-backed bills introduced in Congress was the [Packaging and Claims Knowledge Act of 2025 \(PACK Act\)](#). A major red flag in this bill is that it wants to [preempt strong Truth in Labeling laws](#) passed by states. Preemption is when the federal government passes a law that can override any state or local laws on the same topic. The industry is arguing that preemption is necessary when it comes to regulating sustainability claims on packaging to create national consistency. The problem? The PACK Act is much weaker than existing state laws, such as [California's labeling law](#). Even worse, when a federal law preempts state laws, it means no state can pass something stronger in the future – even to protect its residents from greenwashed recyclable, compostable, or reusable labels.

Utilize Our Legal System

As several of the examples above reveal, the courtroom can be a powerful arena for confronting greenwashing. When individuals, nonprofit organizations, and government agencies challenge deceptive claims through legal action, they send a clear message that misleading the public carries consequences. Of course, lawsuits demand time, funding, and expertise – resources not everyone can readily provide. But that doesn't mean you have to be on the sidelines. By donating to or volunteering with consumer advocacy groups, you help fuel the very efforts that hold corporations accountable and turn legal pressure into lasting change.

You can also submit a complaint to your [state's consumer protection agency](#) or the [Federal Trade Commission](#). Both are designed to shield you from exploitative business practices. These administrative options usually involve a straightforward online form, making them far more accessible than litigation.

JUST ZERO CAN HELP

Greenwashing is complex by design – it thrives on confusion. That’s why Just Zero is committed to shifting power back where it belongs: with you. In this report, we analyze key greenwashing cases from 2025 to help sharpen your ability to spot deceptive environmental claims and see past polished marketing to uncover the truth.

But awareness is only the beginning. Just Zero partners with communities working to advance Truth in Labeling laws at both the state and federal levels, helping turn concern into concrete policy change. Our [Model Legislative Toolkit](#) is designed to support the creation of bills tailored to your state’s specific needs. We also offer [technical guidance](#) to help move your zero waste work from idea to enactment.

Beyond labeling reform, we champion strong Zero Waste policies by supporting strategic campaigns and providing experienced advocacy. [Together](#), we can push for meaningful environmental and public health protections – building a future grounded not in empty promises, but in accountable, effective policy.

Questions? Contact us:
info@just-zero.org

