



Guidelines to Combat Greenwashing

For Prelims: [Greenwashing](#), [Central Consumer Protection Authority \(CCPA\)](#), [Greenhouse gas emissions](#), [Environmental Impact Assessments \(EIA\)](#), [Extended Producer Responsibility \(EPR\)](#), [EU](#), Greenwashing Guidelines, [COP27](#)

For Mains: Consumer Protection and Environmental Claims, Corporate Accountability and Greenwashing, Global Environmental Governance, Challenges in Combating Greenwashing, Environmental Ethics and Sustainable Development

Source: [BS](#)

Why in News?

Recently, the [Central Consumer Protection Authority \(CCPA\)](#) released guidelines to regulate [greenwashing](#) and misleading [environmental claims](#). This initiative seeks to ensure transparency and consumer trust in [eco-friendly](#) marketing practices.

Central Consumer Protection Authority (CCPA)

- CCPA is the regulatory body established under Section 10 of the [Consumer Protection Act \(CPA\), 2019](#), it regulates matters related to consumer rights violations and unfair trade practices.
 - The act empowers the CCPA to prevent false or misleading advertisements and ensure consumer rights are protected.
- It operates under the **Ministry of Consumer Affairs, Food and Public Distribution.**

What is Greenwashing?

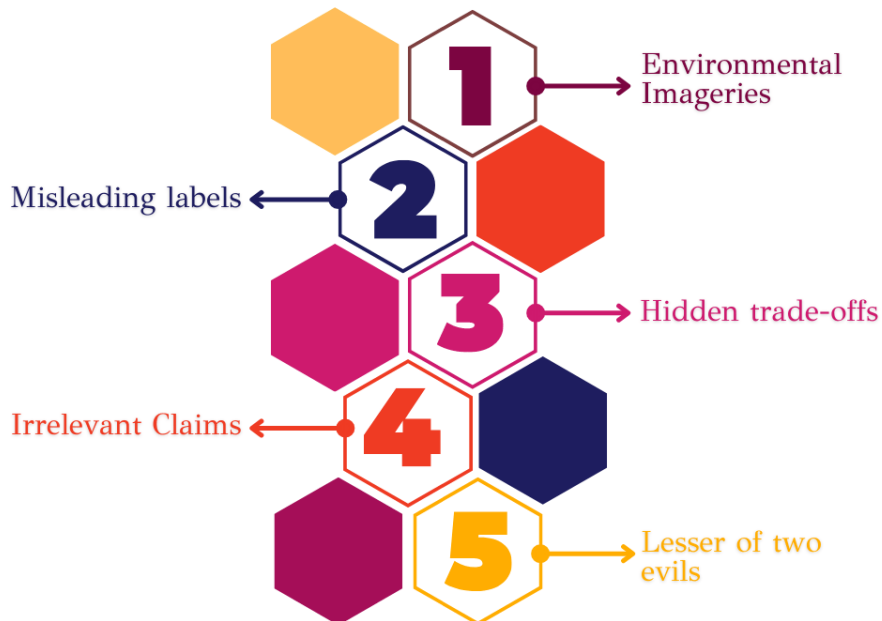
- **About:**
 - The term greenwashing was first used in **1986 by Jay Westerveld**, an American environmentalist and researcher.
 - Refers to any deceptive or misleading practice involving exaggeration, omission, or **false environmental claims**.
 - Use of misleading symbols, imagery, or language that highlights positive environmental aspects while concealing harmful ones.
 - **Exclusions:** It does not include obvious hyperbole, puffery, or generic colour schemes/images that aren't deceptive.
 - **Environmental Claims** refer to the representations about goods or services, including their components, manufacturing processes, packaging, usage, or disposal, that **suggest environmentally friendly attributes**.
- **Examples of Greenwashing:**
 - **Volkswagen Scandal:** The German car manufacturer was discovered to have

manipulated emissions tests for its allegedly eco-friendly diesel vehicles, which constituted an instance of greenwashing.

- Several other multinational corporations, including oil giants like **Shell and BP**, and **Coca Cola** have faced accusations of greenwashing.

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TYPES OF GREENWASHING



What are the Key Points From the Greenwashing Guidelines?

- **Objective:**
 - The aim is to combat **greenwashing**, a practice where companies falsely promote products as environmentally friendly without credible proof, protecting consumers from **deceptive marketing tactics**.
- **Applicability:**
 - These guidelines target **manufacturers, service providers, traders, ad agencies, and endorsers**, requiring them to substantiate environmental claims.
 - Terms like **eco-friendly, green, sustainable, natural**, and others must be backed by **credible evidence**, avoiding vague or misleading descriptions.
 - For instance, terms like **100% eco-friendly or zero emissions** must be qualified with precise information on the product or service.
 - The guidelines **do not apply** to advertisements or communications **that are not specific to a product or service unless they directly or indirectly refer to one**.
- **Verification & Disclosure:**
 - Companies must support their environmental claims with **independent studies, third-party certifications, or reliable scientific evidence**.
 - Claims must specify which part of the product (e.g., packaging, manufacturing) is eco-friendly and must be accessible via **QR codes, URLs, or clear advertisements**.
- **Penalties for Misleading Claims:**
 - Any company found violating these guidelines may face penalties for misleading advertising and **unfair trade practices under consumer protection laws**.
 - **Future-oriented claims** (e.g., goals to reduce carbon emissions) can only be made if backed by actionable and transparent plans.
 - Specific environmental claims like **“compostable,” “plastic-free,” “recyclable,”** etc., must be supported by **scientific evidence or third-party verification**, and should be made available for consumer reference.
- **Technical Terms:**
 - To improve consumer understanding, companies are required to explain technical terms

like greenhouse gas emissions or Environmental Impact Assessments (EIA) in user-friendly language.

▪ **Central Consumer Protection Authority's (CCPA) Role:**

- The **CCPA will oversee the enforcement** of these guidelines, working with various stakeholders to ensure compliance, prevent consumer harm, and promote truthful **environmental advertising**.





THE HISTORY OF GREENWASHING

PRE-1980s

Misleading green claims were here, just without the infamous name we know today. After the nuclear meltdowns in Michigan and Idaho, Westinghouse ads praise the virtues of nuclear energy - with **questionable corporate motives**.

2000s-10s

Despite rising knowledge that **greenwashing** is bad, corporations continue to misbehave and mislead, in a void of regulation. In 2004, BP popularizes the **carbon footprint** - an underhand idea to shift the responsibility from company to consumer.

TODAY

Legislation is catching up. The EU **bans generic eco labels**. The US' Federal Trade Association (FTA) is due for a Green Guide update. The UK has a plethora of open **greenwashing investigations**. Greenwashing is still here, but under pressure.

1980s-90s

In 1983, Jay Westerveld coins the term '**greenwashing**', after staying at an expanding resort in Fiji urging guests to **reuse towels** to save the planet. Eco-consciousness grows in the '80s and the term's use spreads. Meanwhile, Big Oil spins its image against mounting scrutiny.

2020s

In 2022, **greenwash** finally makes it into the dictionary, as awareness rises and the word enters everyday conversations. Searches for **greenwashing** and related terms peak around the same time. Laws start to emerge and record penalties are made.



What are the Key Factors Driving Greenwashing in India?

- **Growing Environmental Awareness:** Increasing awareness among Indian consumers about environmental issues has led to a demand for eco-friendly products.
 - Companies may exaggerate claims to meet this demand, with consumers willing to pay

more for green products.

- **Regulatory Pressure:** Government regulations like the [Extended Producer Responsibility \(EPR\)](#) policy create pressure on companies to appear environmentally responsible, sometimes leading to false compliance claims.
- **Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR):** Companies overstating their environmental efforts to meet the [mandatory 2% CSR](#) spending requirement under the [Companies Act, 2013](#), is a driver of greenwashing.
- **Media and NGO Activism:** Media and [NGOs](#) uncover greenwashing practices, pushing companies towards greater transparency.
 - Investigations reveal deceptive environmental claims, like misleading **biodegradability labels**.
- **Consumer Scepticism:** Due to frequent greenwashing, Indian consumers distrust sustainability claims, leading to higher demand for third-party certifications.

Global Initiatives to Combat Greenwashing

- **UNFCCC COP27 Declaration:** [UN Secretary-General](#) calls for zero tolerance for greenwashing, urging corporations to amend their practices.
- **EU Green Bond Standards:** In October 2023, the [EU](#) approved [new standards](#) to combat greenwashing, promoting transparency.
- **European Green Bond Label:** Requires **85% of funds** to be directed toward sustainable activities, supporting climate neutrality goals.

What are the Concerns Surrounding Greenwashing?

- **Dilution of Climate Goals:** Misleading claims undermine the credibility of genuine environmental efforts.
- **Unfair Recognition:** Entities practising greenwashing may gain undue rewards for irresponsible behavior.
- **Market Distortion:** Greenwashing creates an uneven market, disadvantaging companies with genuine [environmental standards](#).
- **Lack of Regulations:** Insufficient standards for environmental claims allow greenwashing to persist unchecked.
- **Carbon Credit Integrity:** Greenwashing weakens the reliability of [carbon credit systems](#), particularly in unregulated markets.

Way Forward

- **Accountability:** Companies must be held accountable for their environmental actions and disclose their policies, practices, and challenges.
- **Support Green Initiatives:** Consumers should back businesses with proven environmental performance and social responsibility.
- **Comprehensive Regulations:** Implement thorough regulations and standards for environmental claims to enhance transparency and accountability.

Read More: [Greenhushing and its Implications](#).

[Drishti Mains Question](#)

What is greenwashing? Suggest measures to mitigate greenwashing in India.

UPSC Civil Services Examination, Previous Year Question (PYQ)

Prelims

Q. Which one of the following best describes the term “greenwashing”?

- a)** Conveying a false impression that a company’s products are eco-friendly and environmentally sound
- b)** Non-inclusion of ecological/environmental costs in the Annual Financial Statements of a country
- c)** Ignoring the disastrous ecological consequences while undertaking infrastructure development
- d)** Making mandatory provisions for environmental costs in a government project/programme

Ans: (a)

PDF Referenece URL: <https://www.drishtias.com/printpdf/guidelines-to-combat-greenwashing>

