



Screening of websites for 'greenwashing': half of green claims lack evidence

Brussels, 28 January 2021

Today, the European Commission and national consumer authorities released the results of a screening of websites ("sweep"), an exercise carried out each year to identify breaches of EU consumer law in online markets. This year, for the first time ever, the sweep focused on 'greenwashing', the practice by which companies claim they are doing more for the environment than they actually are. The "sweep" analysed green online claims from various business sectors such as garments, cosmetics and household equipment. National consumer protection authorities had reason to believe that in 42% of cases the claims were exaggerated, false or deceptive and could potentially qualify as unfair commercial practices under EU rules. 'Greenwashing' has increased as consumers increasingly seek to buy environmentally sound products.

Didier **Reynders**, Commissioner for Justice, said: *"More and more people want to live a green life, and I applaud companies that strive to produce eco-friendly products or services. However, there are also unscrupulous traders out there, who pull the wool over consumers' eyes with vague, false or exaggerated claims. The Commission is fully committed to empowering consumers in the green transition and fighting greenwashing. This is precisely one of the main priorities of the [New Consumer Agenda](#) adopted last autumnn."*

Main findings:

After a broader screening, the Commission and consumer authorities examined 344 seemingly dubious claims in more detail and found that:

- In more than half of the cases, the trader did not provide sufficient information for consumers to judge the claim's accuracy.
- In 37% of cases, the claim included vague and general statements such as "conscious", "eco-friendly", "sustainable" which aimed to convey the unsubstantiated impression to consumers that a product had no negative impact on the environment.
- Moreover, in 59% of cases the trader had not provided easily accessible evidence to support its claim.

In their overall assessments, taking various factors into account, in 42% of cases authorities had reason to believe that the claim may be false or deceptive and could therefore potentially amount to an unfair commercial practice under the Unfair Commercial Practices Directive ([UCPD](#)).

Next steps

National authorities will contact the companies concerned to point out the issues detected and to ensure that these are rectified where necessary. The findings of this sweep will feed into the impact assessment to be prepared for the new legislative proposal to empower [consumers for the green transition](#), which was announced in the [New Consumer Agenda](#).

Background

A "sweep" is a set of checks carried out simultaneously on different websites to identify possible breaches of EU consumer law in a particular sector. This year the "sweep" focused on companies claiming to sell environmentally friendly products.

Sweeps are coordinated by the European Commission and carried out yearly by national enforcement authorities in the EU, gathered in the [Consumer Protection Cooperation Network](#) (CPC). Information on previous sweeps can be found [here](#).

This year's sweep was not only coordinated with consumer enforcement authorities in Europe, but around the globe, under the umbrella of the International Consumer Protection and Enforcement Network (ICPEN). Today ICPEN are also releasing their [results](#), which show similar trends.

The screening of websites with the focus on 'greenwashing' is one of several initiatives the

Commission undertakes in order to empower consumers to make more sustainable choices. Another initiative is the Green Consumption Pledge which Commissioner Reynders launched on the 25th of January 2021 as well as a [legislative proposal to empower consumers for the green transition](#) with better information on products' sustainability and better protection against certain practices, such as 'greenwashing' and early obsolescence. Furthermore, a [legislative proposal on the substantiation of green claims](#) based on the Environmental Footprint methods will follow.

As part of its [Farm to Fork](#) Strategy, the Commission will propose harmonised mandatory front-of-pack nutrition labelling to empower consumers to make informed, healthy, and sustainable food choices. For various household appliances, the EU energy label already provides a clear and simple indication of the energy efficiency of products, thus making it easier for consumers to save money on household energy bills while reducing greenhouse gas emissions across the EU.

According to a recent [Consumer Market Monitoring Survey](#), 78% of consumers found the likely environmental impact of household appliances very important or fairly important when making their choice.

For more information

[Factsheet](#) on the [Regulation on consumer protection](#).

More information on your [rights as a consumer in the EU](#)

IP/21/269

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