Seven
The Six Sins of Greenwashing™

Green-wash (grē’n-wōsh’, -wōsh’) – verb: the act of misleading consumers regarding the environmental practices of a company or the environmental benefits of a product or service.

**Sin of the Hidden Trade-Off**
A claim suggesting that a product is ‘green’ based on a narrow set of attributes without attention to other important environmental issues.
Example: Paper is not necessarily environmentally preferable just because it comes from a sustainably-harvested forest. Other important environmental issues in the paper-making process, such as greenhouse gas emissions, or chlorine use in bleaching may be equally important.

**Sin of Irrelevance**
An environmental claim that may be truthful but is unimportant or unhelpful for consumers seeking environmentally preferable products.
Example: ‘CFC-free’. This is a frequent claim despite the fact that CFCs are banned by law.

**Sin of No Proof**
An environmental claim that cannot be substantiated by easily accessible supporting information or by a reliable third-party certification.
Example: Facial tissues or toilet tissue products that claim various percentages of post-consumer recycled content without providing evidence.

**Sin of Fibbing**
Environmental claims that are simply false.
Example: Products falsely claiming to be Energy Star certified or registered.

**Sin of Vagueness**
A claim that is so poorly defined or broad that its real meaning is likely to be misunderstood by the consumer.
Example: ‘All-natural’. Arsenic, uranium, mercury, and formaldehyde are all naturally occurring, and poisonous. ‘All natural’ isn’t necessarily ‘green’.

**Sin of Less of Two Evils**
A claim that may be true within the product category, but that risks distracting the consumer from the greater environmental impacts of the category as a whole.
Example: Organic cigarettes and fuel-efficient sport-utility vehicles.

**Sin of Worshiping False Labels**
A product that, through either words or images, gives the impression of a third-party endorsement where no such endorsement actually exists, fake labels, in other words.
Example: Manufacturers who add their own label to a product with images and statements such as, ‘this product fights global warming’.

www.sinsofgreenwashing.org