

SUSTAINABILITY NEWS

Environment Committee



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Greenwashing Special edition! Our 'Greenwashing 101' feature unpacks the risks, essential guidelines, and real-world case studies to help you navigate this complex landscape.

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With the PNZ conference just around the corner, we're excited to share some teasers ahead of our OCS NZ relaunch!

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Our newest piece, 'An Interview with...', introduces our EnviroCommittee members, letting you know a bit more about us, our roles, and our motivators!

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Eartha provides top tips to help you share your sustainability success stories!

GREENWASHING 101

Sustainability continues to be a key focus for consumers and regulators. There is increasing pressure for companies to demonstrate their environmental credentials. However, in the rush to promote eco-consciousness, false, misleading, and unsubstantiated claims have arisen. Inadvertently falling foul of making such claims can not only damage your company's reputation but also land you in legal trouble.

DID YOU KNOW?

71% of NZ consumers find it hard to tell which products are ethically good or bad
([Kantar, 2024](#))

WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW:

False and Misleading Claims Can Get You into Trouble

The Commerce Commission (ComCom) has made it clear that misleading environmental claims will not be tolerated under the Fair Trading Act. This means that claims must be accurate, substantiated, and not create a false impression. Failure to comply can lead to hefty fines, legal action, and brand damage.

COMPANIES HAVE BEEN PENALISED FOR VAGUE OR MISLEADING STATEMENTS SUCH AS “BIODEGRADABLE” WITHOUT PROOF, OR “100% RECYCLABLE” WHEN THE PRODUCT WAS NOT WIDELY ACCEPTED IN KERBSIDE RECYCLING. IT IS IMPORTANT TO PROTECT YOURSELF WHEN MAKING ENVIRONMENTAL CLAIMS.

Guidelines Exist to Help You Understand Your Boundaries

Commerce Commission Environmental Claims Guidelines:

These guidelines provide clear direction on how to ensure claims are not misleading, including the need for robust evidence, avoiding broad or ambiguous language, and ensuring claims apply to the entire product lifecycle.

[Read the ComCom Environmental Claims Guidelines here](#)



Bioplastics, Biodegradables, and Compostable Claims

Guidelines: Given the complexity of the bioplastics and compostables space, it is useful to explore relevant guidelines to ensure good understanding of materials, certification requirements, and appropriate disposal pathways before making claims.

Read the WasteMinz Guidelines here and the MFE Guidelines here.

Advertising Standards

Authority (ASA)

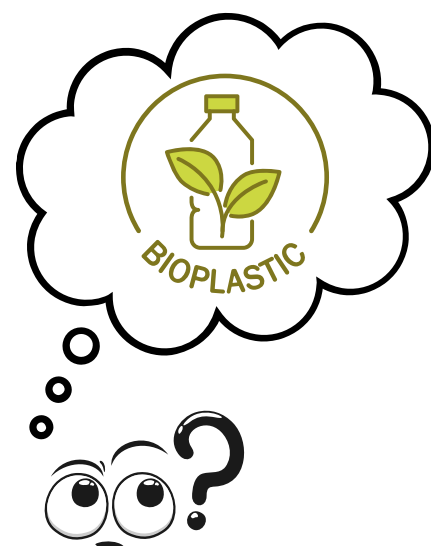
Environmental and Social Responsibility Code: This code applies to all advertising and marketing communications and sets standards for environmental and social responsibility claims.

Check out the ASA code here.

CASE STUDIES:

Mars: 'Recyclable Paper Based Wrapper'

In 2022, Mars introduces a paper-plastic composite wrapper which claimed to be recyclable. Unfortunately, due to infrastructure differences between Australia and NZ, the claim did not hold up onshore. Mars has to amend the issue by covering the claim on their wrappers in NZ to ensure they did not end up contaminating our recycling streams. This highlights the importance of understanding local infrastructure before making claims! Read more here.



It's Not Just About the Environment!

Businesses should also be mindful of social responsibility claims. Statements about ethical sourcing, fair trade, and labour practices need to be backed by evidence too. Misleading social claims can attract scrutiny under the same consumer protection laws and be just as damaging as false environmental ones.

Goody: 'Biodegradable Plastic Bags'

In 2010, Goody Environment Pty Ltd marketed their plastic bags as "biodegradable," claiming they would break down in landfill conditions. However, the bags did not decompose as promised, and the company was found to have misled consumers about the product's environmental claims. The ACCC took legal action, and Goody was ordered to issue corrective notices and contribute towards legal costs. This case highlights the need for clear, verified disposal pathways and certifications to avoid misleading claims. [Read more here.](#)

Glopac: 'Recyclable Hot Drink Cups'

In 2021, Glopac New Zealand Ltd claimed that its 100% paper hot drink cups were recyclable. However, due to the prevalence of plastic-lined cups in New Zealand, recycling facilities do not accept these cups, leading to potential contamination of recycling streams. The Commerce Commission warned Glopac for likely breaching the Fair Trading Act by making misleading claims about recyclability. This case underscores the importance of aligning environmental claims with local recycling infrastructure capabilities. [Read more here.](#)

**FOR MORE EXAMPLES, VISIT:
CONSUMER NZ GREENWASHING WATCH
COMMERCE COMMISSION CASES**

Key Takeaways for Plastics NZ Members

Ensure all claims are accurate, evidence-based, and not misleading.

Know the relevant guidelines and comply with industry standards.

Be clear about what your claim applies to—the entire product or just part of it?

Remember that social responsibility claims are just as important as environmental ones.

By following best practices and ensuring transparency, plastics industry businesses can build trust with customers, regulators, and the wider public while avoiding the risks of greenwashing. If in doubt, seek guidance before making a claim—because in sustainability, credibility is everything!

OCS NZ RELAUNCH

As you will hopefully be aware, Operation Clean Sweep NZ (OCS NZ) will undergo a major relaunch at the Plastics New Zealand Conference on May 15th-16th this year!



The refreshed programme will bring an enhanced audit process, new partnership opportunities, and additional resource to maximise its value. This will help members ensure regulatory compliance, support brand reputation, and (most importantly) keep our awa and moana free of plastic pellets, flakes, and powders!



A key highlight of the relaunch is the introduction of the Partners and Supporters schemes, which enable companies across the plastics supply chain to actively contribute to the programme. Partners will provide essential services, such as spill response and stormwater management solutions, while Supporters will champion the initiative by encouraging their suppliers and customers to gain certification. This collaboration will strengthen industry-wide accountability and drive improved environmental outcomes.

Additionally, insights from the recent pilot programme will be shared, with three sites who have carried out reaudits sharing their experiences of the new programme. We're excited to hear their thoughts!

The relaunch also comes with enhanced benefits for participating businesses, including a new collateral pack to support effective site management and staff training. These resources will help companies communicate best practices clearly and ensure that employees are well-equipped to uphold OCS NZ standards.

The PNZ Conference is the perfect platform to unveil these updates, bringing together industry leaders to drive meaningful change. If your business is ready to step up and make a difference, join us in May to learn more about how you can be part of the reinvigorated OCS NZ movement.

AN INTERVIEW WITH... GREER LARSEN-COMPTON

As this is the Enviro Committee Newsletter, we thought this was the perfect place for us to let you get to know the Enviro Committee Members! Enter our newest Newsletter staple - 'An Interview with...!' This edition, we've been lucky enough to lock in Greer from Re.Group. A very warm welcome to her!



Can you tell us a little about yourself and your role?

As Education and Engagement Manager at the Re.Group Material Recovery Facility in Auckland, I work to continually enrich the educational experience and offerings available to Auckland residents around recycling. Our focus is meaningful and relevant engagement with community, educators and businesses, to support understanding and participation in resource recovery practices. I've been in the resource recovery sector for nearing a decade. I've seen Aotearoa come a long way in resource recovery progress, and the future is full of new opportunities for growth in sustainability.



What motivated you to join the PNZ Enviro Committee?

Through many years interacting with Plastics NZ, I've held great respect for the organisation and their work. I jumped at the opportunity to contribute to this committee of talented professionals, to offer additional insight on recycling and packaging sustainability topics.

What's one thing you wish everyone understood about your field of work?

I wish everyone knew not to put batteries and gas canisters into bins! They are a very real hazard and cause fires that put Kiwis at risk every day. There are safer ways to dispose of the things that aren't accepted at kerbside - and you can find out by playing a game - give it a go! Recycle Right



What's one sustainability trend or innovation that excites you right now?

Product Stewardship! Yes, it's been around for a while, but at this time I sense growing focus in Aotearoa. Whether it's Batteries, Refrigerants or a Container Return Scheme, there's so much benefit to be gained for industry, community and environment. It's inspiring to see brands and businesses step up and proactively look at ways to take responsibility and care of this beautiful country that we're part of.

Are you a recycling wizz? Take the test at:
WWW.RECYCLERIGHT.CO.NZ

ASK EARTHA

Q. HOW DO WE SHARE OUR ENVIRONMENTAL SUCCESS STORY?

We want to communicate our sustainability efforts, but we're worried about getting it wrong. We've seen companies get called out for greenwashing, while others say nothing for fear of backlash. How do we share our environmental claims without putting ourselves at risk?

OUR
ENVIRONMENTAL
AGONY AUNT
ANSWERS YOUR
ECO-ENQUIRIES

A. WALKING THE GREEN LINE

Ah, the sustainability tightrope! Too much, and you're accused of greenwashing; too little, and you're guilty of 'greenhushing'. Both can harm your reputation, but what are they?

Greenwashing: Exaggerated, misleading, or make vague environmental claims that aren't backed by evidence. Lead to consumer distrust and even legal consequences.



Greenhushing: Staying silent about legitimate sustainability efforts to avoid scrutiny or backlash. Seems safer, but it means missing out on customer trust, competitive advantage, and regulatory recognition.

But there's a way to get it right!

Stick to the Facts – Be clear, specific, and measurable. Saying "eco-friendly" means little, but "contains 30% post-consumer recycled content" is verifiable.

Back It Up – Use third-party certifications, lifecycle assessments, or scientific data to support claims. NZ's Fair Trading Act and Commerce Commission guidelines require businesses to provide proof of environmental statements.

Avoid Buzzword Bingo – Words like "sustainable," "biodegradable," or "carbon-neutral" need context. Define your terms and be upfront about any limitations (e.g., compostable only in industrial facilities).

Tell the Whole Story – No product is perfect. Transparency is key! Instead of "100% sustainable," say, "We've reduced our carbon footprint by 40% and are working toward net zero by 2030."

Know Your Audience – Different stakeholders care about different things. A B2B buyer may want technical data, while a consumer may respond to simple, honest messaging.



The Risk of Doing Nothing

In an era of growing regulatory scrutiny (think EU Green Claims Directive, ACCC crackdowns in Australia, and increasing NZ oversight), silence isn't always golden. Transparent and accurate communication isn't just about marketing—it's about staying ahead of compliance risks.

Final Verdict

Don't let the fear of getting it wrong stop you from saying anything at all. The key is honesty, clarity, and proof. Get those right, and you'll avoid both greenwashing scandals and greenhushing regrets.

Stay bold, stay truthful, and keep leading the way!

CONTACT US:

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