BIZNEWSFEED

# Green Claims Without Greenwashing

*A practical evidence framework for sustainability statements, carbon claims and business disclosures*

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# Executive summary

Environmental communication creates value only when readers can understand what is being claimed, how it was measured and where its limits lie. European Commission evidence has highlighted the scale of the problem: its Green Claims overview reports that 53% of reviewed green claims provided vague, misleading or unfounded information and 40% had no supporting evidence.[1] A separate coordinated sweep of 344 sustainability claims found that authorities lacked sufficient information to assess accuracy in 57.5% of cases and found no easily accessible qualification or supporting evidence in 59%.[2] These figures do not mean every sustainability claim is misleading. They show why businesses and publishers should move from broad labels such as “green” or “sustainable” toward specific, scoped and substantiated statements. U.S. FTC guidance similarly warns against broad unqualified general environmental benefit claims and calls for competent and reliable scientific evidence.[3]

# Intended audience and questions addressed

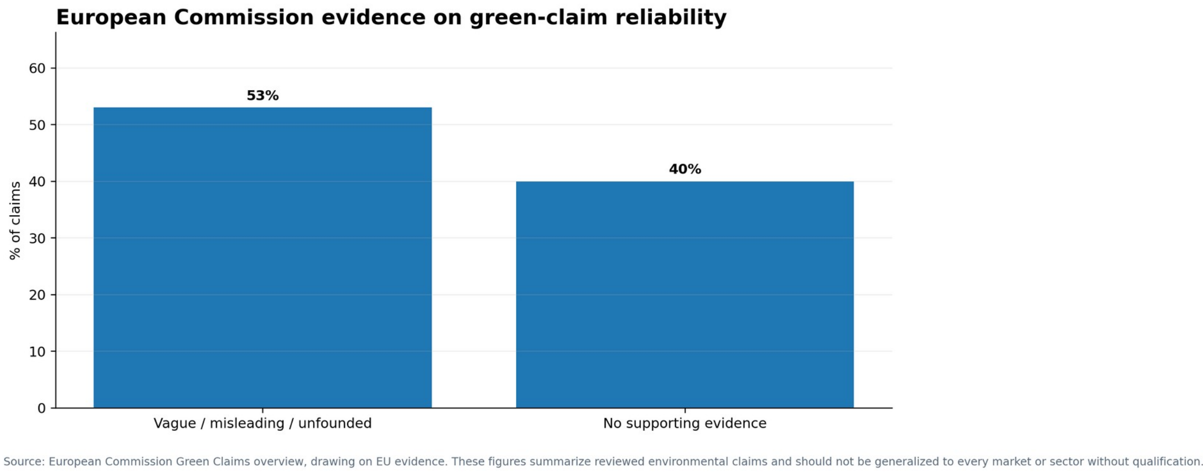
Executives, sustainability teams, marketers, founders, investors and business readers who need to evaluate or publish environmental statements without overstating what the evidence supports.

- What makes an environmental claim specific enough to evaluate?
- How do product claims differ from corporate sustainability disclosures?
- When do greenhouse-gas scopes and boundaries matter?
- Which evidence, qualifications and governance steps reduce greenwashing risk?

# 1. Why specificity is the first control

A broad phrase such as “eco-friendly” can imply an overall environmental benefit across materials, manufacturing, use, transport and end of life. That is difficult to substantiate because a product can improve one attribute while worsening another. FTC guidance therefore cautions against broad, unqualified general environmental benefit claims and recommends clear, prominent and specific qualifications.[3] The UK CMA similarly states that green claims should be truthful and accurate, clear and unambiguous, not omit important information, make fair comparisons, consider the full life cycle where appropriate, and be substantiated.[4]

### Figure 1. Why green-claim substantiation matters



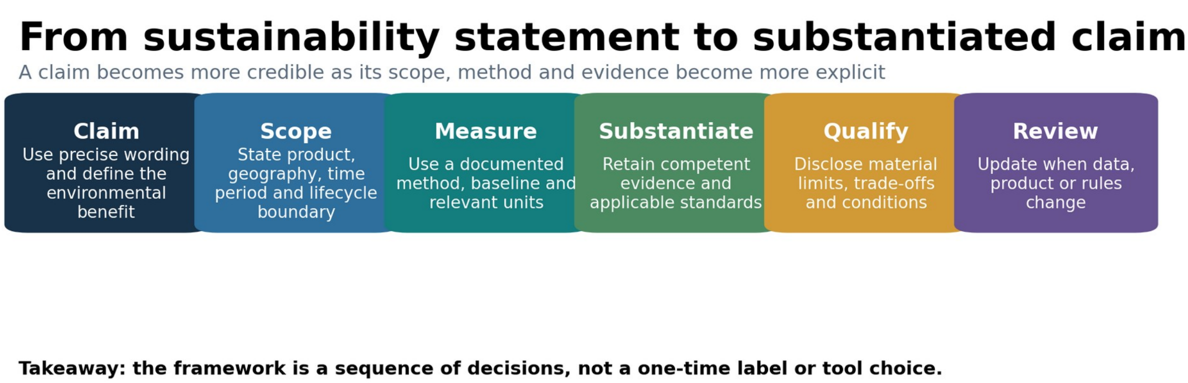

*Selected European Commission indicators on the reliability and substantiation of environmental claims.*

Source: European Commission [1].

**Takeaway: The most common credibility gap is not the absence of sustainability activity; it is communication that is too broad or too weakly evidenced to verify.**

## 2. Build a claim from evidence outward

### Figure 2. The substantiated-claim workflow




*A six-stage workflow for turning sustainability evidence into a bounded public statement.*

Source: Original BizNewsFeed framework informed by FTC, CMA, GHG Protocol, ISSB and ISO guidance [3-8].

**Takeaway: The safest wording is the wording the underlying evidence can actually carry.**

## 3. Distinguish claim types before selecting evidence

| Claim type | Example of a specific claim | Evidence typically needed | Common failure mode |
|---|---|---|---|
| Product attribute | "Packaging contains 70% recycled fiber by weight" | Material specification, calculation method, supplier records | Using "recycled" without stating the percentage or component |

| Claim type | Example of a specific claim | Evidence typically needed | Common failure mode |
|---|---|---|---|
| Operational reduction | "Site electricity emissions fell 18% vs 2024" | Defined organizational boundary, energy data, emission factors, baseline consistency | Changing boundary or baseline without explanation |
| Carbon footprint | "Product footprint is X kg CO2e from cradle to gate" | Life-cycle method, functional unit, boundary, data sources, assumptions | Comparing footprints calculated with different boundaries |
| Renewable energy | "100% of purchased electricity matched with specified instruments" | Energy consumption data and instrument records; market/location context | Implying the whole business is zero-emission |
| Net-zero / carbon neutral | A dated target or claim with specified scope and treatment of residual emissions | Inventory, reduction pathway, target boundary and credible treatment of offsets/removals | Relying on offsets while obscuring gross emissions or scope |
| Corporate sustainability risk disclosure | Material climate risks, governance and metrics | Governance, strategy, risk-management and metrics disclosures | Treating investor disclosure as a marketing badge |

**Table 1. Claim-to-evidence matrix.** Source: original synthesis based on FTC [3], CMA [4], GHG Protocol [5] and ISSB [6,7].

## 4. Carbon accounting: boundaries determine meaning

The GHG Protocol Corporate Standard provides a widely used framework for corporate greenhouse-gas inventories, while its Scope 3 standard addresses value-chain emissions.[5] The familiar scope labels are not a quality score. Scope 1 covers direct emissions from owned or controlled sources; Scope 2 covers emissions associated with purchased energy; Scope 3 covers other value-chain emissions. A statement such as "we cut emissions 20%" is incomplete unless the reader can tell which scopes, entities, geography and time period are included and whether the baseline was recalculated after acquisitions, divestments or methodological changes.

A credible claim also distinguishes absolute emissions from intensity metrics. Absolute emissions answer how much was emitted; intensity answers emissions per unit of output, revenue or another denominator. Either can be useful, but an intensity improvement can coexist with rising absolute emissions if output grows. The metric should match the claim rather than being selected solely because it produces the most favorable narrative.

## 5. Corporate disclosure is different from consumer marketing

The ISSB's IFRS S1 and IFRS S2 were designed as a global baseline for investor-focused sustainability-related disclosures. IFRS S1 organizes information around governance, strategy, risk-management processes, and metrics and targets; IFRS S2 focuses specifically on climate-related disclosures.[6,7] These standards are not consumer ecolabels and do not certify that a company is "sustainable." They structure decision-useful disclosure about risks and opportunities. Marketing teams should not convert compliance with a reporting framework into an unsupported general environmental superiority claim.

## 6. Self-declared claims still need documentation

ISO 14021:2026 addresses self-declared environmental claims and the documentation and methodologies used to assess them.[8] "Self-declared" does not mean "evidence optional." A business should be able to produce the records, calculation method and assumptions supporting a public claim and should retain them for a period appropriate to the claim's life. Third-party verification can strengthen confidence in some contexts, but the presence of a logo or certificate does not cure a misleading statement about what was actually verified.

## 7. Comparisons demand a common basis

Comparative environmental claims are especially sensitive to boundary choices. "30% lower carbon" must identify lower than what: a previous version, a competitor, an industry benchmark or a baseline year. The products or periods being compared should perform equivalent functions and be measured on a consistent basis. Material differences in geography, energy mix, product life, allocation rules, data quality or functional unit should be disclosed when they could change the conclusion.

## 8. A newsroom and marketing evidence protocol

For publishers such as BizNewsFeed, environmental claims made by companies should be attributed to the company unless independently verified. A sentence such as "Company X says its new process reduced energy use by 25%" is materially different from stating the reduction as an established fact. Where the claim is consequential, reporting should identify the measurement period, baseline, scope and whether evidence or assurance is public. This distinction protects readers from confusing corporate assertions with independent findings.

## 9. Evidence hierarchy and assurance

Not all supporting material has the same evidentiary weight. A marketing deck that repeats a supplier statement is weaker than primary measurement records; an internal calculation with a documented method is generally more informative than an unsupported adjective; and independent assurance can add confidence when the assurance scope, criteria and level are clear. The key is to describe what the evidence actually establishes. "Third-party verified" is incomplete if readers cannot tell which metric, period, boundary or standard the verifier examined.

For editorial use, a practical hierarchy is: primary data and official filings; recognized standards-based calculations; independent assurance or regulator records; peer-reviewed or authoritative secondary analysis; and finally company statements. Lower levels are not automatically unusable, but they should be attributed and qualified. This is especially important when a claim affects investment, purchasing or policy decisions, because a precise attribution allows readers to distinguish a reported corporate position from an independently established fact.

## Reader checklist: before publishing or relying on a green claim

☐ Write the claim so a skeptical reader can tell exactly what changed.

☐ State the product, entity, geography, period and lifecycle boundary.

☐ Identify the baseline and whether it is comparable to the current measurement.

☐ Name the method, standard or calculation approach used.

☐ Retain source data and evidence proportionate to the claim.

☐ Disclose material exclusions, assumptions, trade-offs and uncertainty.

☐ For comparisons, confirm both sides use a common functional unit and boundary.

☐ Attribute company statements when evidence has not been independently verified.

☐ Set a review date so the claim is updated when data, product design or rules change.

## Conclusion

A trustworthy sustainability claim is narrow enough to test. It tells readers what changed, where, when, against which baseline, using which method and with which limitations. GHG accounting standards can improve consistency, investor-disclosure frameworks can improve decision-useful reporting, and marketing guidance can reduce misleading generalizations, but none of them turns a broad slogan into evidence. The practical discipline is to let the evidence set the wording, not the other way around.

## Research method and limitations

This paper reviews official consumer-protection guidance, greenhouse-gas accounting standards and sustainability-disclosure frameworks available as of 12 September 2026. The European Commission percentages summarize specific EU reviews and are included as indicators of observed claim-quality problems, not as prevalence estimates for all sectors or countries. Laws and enforcement standards differ by jurisdiction, and standards can be updated. Businesses should check current local legal requirements and sector-specific rules before making regulated or high-impact claims.

## References

1. European Commission, Green Claims overview. Source link

2. European Commission, 2020 sweep on misleading sustainability claims. Source link

3. U.S. Federal Trade Commission, Environmental Claims: Summary of the Green Guides. Source link

4. UK Competition and Markets Authority, Green Claims Code guidance. Source link

5. GHG Protocol, Corporate Standard and standards overview. Source link

6. IFRS Foundation, ISSB issues IFRS S1 and IFRS S2. Source link

7. IFRS Foundation, IFRS S1 General Requirements for Disclosure of Sustainability-related Financial Information. Source link

8. ISO 14021:2026, Environmental statements and programmes for products — Self-declared environmental claims. Source link

# Appendix A. Underlying chart data

| Indicator | Reported share | Source context |
|---|---|---|
| Vague, misleading or unfounded information | 53% | European Commission Green Claims evidence |
| No supporting evidence | 40% | European Commission Green Claims evidence |

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