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## Greenwashing: How to Recognize Misleading Environmental Claims

Nowadays, as environmental awareness gains traction, more and more goods are being advertised as "green," "natural," "clean," or "eco-friendly". Cleaning supplies, personal hygiene products, clothing, building materials, food packaging, and many other everyday items may make these claims. But not all environmental claims are reliable, honest, or backed by data.

When a business uses deceptive language, imagery, or marketing to make a product or practice seem more environmentally friendly than it actually is, this is known as "greenwashing." Occasionally, the declaration is unclear or overstated. In other instances, one positive aspect is highlighted while more important health or environmental issues are ignored.

False claims can be particularly concerning for people with Multiple Chemical Sensitivity (MCS). Even if a product is labelled as "natural" or "green," it may still contain volatile organic compounds, fragrances, or other ingredients that can make it difficult to use or trigger symptoms. Environmental marketing should never be interpreted as an assurance that a product is universally safe or appropriate.

### How to Spot Greenwashing

#### Look out for Vague or Unclear Terminology

Although they may sound comforting, terms like "eco-friendly," "earth-safe," "non-toxic," "chemical-free," "clean," and "natural" don't always have precise or accepted definitions. The wording may not provide much useful information if a company doesn't define the claim or offer proof to back it up.

#### Be Wary of Nature-Themed Packaging

Green shades, foliage, flowers, forests, and pictures of clean air can all give the impression that a product is better for the environment than it really is. Evidence does not come from packaging design. Go beyond the picture. Read labels!

#### Watch out for Claims without Proof

Accurate, easily accessible data should be used to back up environmental claims. When businesses make big claims without offering standards, test results, ingredient information, or other proof that customers can independently verify, take this as a sign to proceed with caution.

### **"Unscented" does not Always Mean "Fragrance-Free."**

It is crucial for people with MCS to understand the difference between "unscented" and "fragrance-free." Masking chemicals may be used in an unscented product to mask the scent of other scented ingredients. Fragrance should typically not be added to a fragrance-free product, but formulations and labels should still be carefully examined. Claims like "naturally fragrances," "lightly scented," or "made with essential oils" do not guarantee that a product is suitable for individuals with MCS. Essential oils and natural fragrances can still cause exposures by releasing volatile compounds.

### **Looking Past Marketing Language**

Recognizing greenwashing does not entail discounting all environmental claims. It means we must take a curious approach to marketing and ask for precise, verifiable information. Transparency, quantifiable action, significant standards, and accountability, rather than just appealing packaging or comforting language, are the hallmarks of true environmental responsibility. By making informed decisions and looking past marketing language, customers can make safer purchases, motivate businesses to enhance their operations, and support goods and regulations that promote accessibility and environmental health.