

# Responsible Environmental Marketing Communications

## Checklist

This checklist is intended to assist marketers, communication agencies and other practitioners in identifying when they are making an environmental claim and offers guidance on questions about such claims. The checklist is designed to serve as a screening check for practitioners to help identify a number of claims and considerations in making claims. Additional guidance is provided in Part 1 and Part 2 of the [ICC Framework on Responsible Environmental Marketing Communications](#). Environmental claims may apply to goods (including packaging or components), as well as services, product lines, or to an organisation or facility.



### 1. Do your proposed claims address:

The effect of the product, component or package on

- solid waste?
- water?
- air (smog, stratospheric ozone, nitrogen oxides (NO<sub>x</sub>), sulphur oxides (SO<sub>x</sub>), etc.)?
- climate (greenhouse gases, carbon offsets, carbon removal, carbon neutrality, climate positivity, etc.)?
- energy usage?
- wildlife and biodiversity?
- human health?
- environment?

Whether the product, component or package is **compostable** or **biodegradable**?

Whether the product or package is **reusable** or **refillable**?

Whether the product, component or package is **recyclable**?

**Future environmental benefits or goals** of the organisation?

Other claims implicating the impact of your products or operations on the health of the planet, the environment or the climate?

The “**sustainability**” of the product, component or package?

The absence, reduction or presence of a specific substance?

Whether the product, component or package is made with or from **renewable material** or **renewable energy**?

Whether the product, component or package contains, is made with, or derives from or can be attributed to **recycled material**?

**YES**

**If the answer is yes to one or more questions, you are making an environmental claim and should evaluate the net impression of the advertising to assure that it is not deceptive or misleading to the intended target audience.**



## 2. Are these benefits or effects express or implied?

- Do you make express statements such as those above?
- Do you use **colours** (e.g., green), **pictures** (e.g., trees, mountains, wildlife) or other elements to connote environmental or sustainability benefits?



## 4. Scope

**Does the claim clearly indicate if it applies to the product, the packaging, or both, or to components or materials?**

**Does the claim indicate if it applies to the entire product line? To a facility? To the entire organisation?**

- The claim should clearly identify the subject of the claim (product, facility, organisation), and what environmental attributes are involved.



## 5. Do you have a reasonable basis for the express & implied claim(s) you are making?

Did you have substantiating scientific data supporting the claim at the time the claim was made? Does the data reflect sound scientific principles likely to be accepted by experts qualified by education, training, and experience in the field? Is the data readily available in the event of a challenge or question? Do you have procedures to retain the substantiating information for an appropriate period related to the useful life of the product?

- Any objective performance claim likely to be material to a consumer, such as a claim about environmental benefits of a product, package, component, service, facility or organisation, or detriments of a competitor's product, package, component, service, facility or organisation, should be supported by relevant test data, analyses or similar information at the time the claim is made.



## 3. Are your proposed claims subject to any mandatory regulations or legislation?

- You may be subject to more stringent or specific disclosures in advertising and labelling or may be required to substantiate certain claims using specific standards or methods.
- Are your proposed claims specific and unambiguous? Vague and non-specific claims are likely to be misleading and should be avoided.
- Your ability to make a claim suggesting a unique benefit when actions are required by law may be limited.

## 6. Are your proposed claims verifiable based on appropriate test methods or scientific data?

What is the test method used? Is it recognised by government agencies or reputable standards organisations?

Does the method accurately reflect how the product, component or package will likely be used or disposed of by the consumer in the manner reflected by the claim?

Has the product, component, or package for which the claim is made (or one substantially identical) been tested? Is the information provided understandable to the typical consumer, avoiding confusing jargon?



- **Standards and test methods must be reasonable and appropriate, and results provided must be clearly presented. Tests should be conducted on products or samples of products for which the environmental claim is made.**
- **Data should be presented in a way that does not exaggerate the validity of the product claim.**



## 7. Generalisations

Are you making a general claim that the product, component or package is “good” for the environment based on a single attribute (e.g., “eco-safe,” “earth friendly,” “environmentally friendly,” “sustainable,” “green,” “carbon neutral” and similar claims)?

- Since environmental impacts encompass a multitude of criteria, a general claim of environmental benefit linked to a single attribute is likely to be misleading unless the relationship is specific and clear.
- Claims about the benefits of carbon or greenhouse gas reduction actions should be transparent and clearly specify whether the claim involves actions to reduce carbon dioxide or all greenhouse gases, and, if the claim applies to only portions of the product’s life cycle, which portions.



## 8. Is the claim relevant to the intended audience?

- It may be misleading or deceptive to make a claim about an environmental benefit that suggests there is a meaningful benefit when there is not.

## 9. Do you state or imply that the product, component, or package has unique environmental benefits?

- Environmental benefits shared by other similar products, components, or packages should not be presented in a way that suggests the benefit is unique to the marketer’s product.



## 10. Life cycle

Are you making a claim based on the product life cycle? What stages of the life cycle are considered (e.g., raw material production, manufacturing, transport to market, disposal)?

- Most guidance on environmental claims does not address claims based on life cycle analysis (LCA).
- The results of an LCA may depend on the inputs.
- Marketers should ensure that the scope of an LCA adequately covers the expected environmental impacts of the product. If an LCA is used to support comparative claims, the identical inputs should be included in the comparative analysis. The products or services involved should also be of the same type or category for the comparison to be fair, and disclosures of material differences in the compared products may be required.

## 11. Apart from environmental benefits, does the claim relate to health, safety or other benefits\*?

\*this might include “free” claims as well as claims such as “safe”, “safer”, “non-toxic”, “pesticide-free” or “organic”

- Express or implied health claims must have a reasonable basis. To meet that standard, each claim may have to be independently substantiated with appropriate scientific research or support.

## 12. Do you state or imply that the product, component or package was made with renewable material or energy?

- An unqualified claim of renewability should not be made unless the product or package consists of 100% renewable content, excluding minor, incidental components.
- Claims about use of renewable energy or power should be substantiated through contracts with electrical utilities, renewable energy certificates (RECs), etc.



### 13. Do you state or imply that the product, component or package has recycled content or is recyclable?

- Is it clear which claim is made? Is the extent of the claim also clear?

Since the Mobius loop standing alone may indicate recyclability and recycled content, further disclosures may be needed if the product or package is recyclable but does not contain recycled content, unless applicability of the claim is clear from the context.

- If you make a recycled content claim, does the product, package, or both contain actual or attributed recycled content?

Marketers must be able to trace and quantify yields and losses in the recycling process to support the claimed amount of recycled content in or attributed to a product or package.

- If you make a recyclable claim, is it clear if the product, package, or both are recyclable?

When a product is labelled as “recyclable,” or the common symbol, the Mobius loop, appears on the product or package, a consumer may not understand whether the package, the product itself, or both are recyclable. Also, the consumer may not understand whether the product or package is merely capable of being recycled or can actually be recycled in the local community.



### 14. Compostable degradable

**Do you state or imply that the product, component or package is compostable or degradable?**

- Marketers making compostable claims should have appropriate scientific evidence that all the materials in the product or package will break down into or otherwise become part of usable compost in an appropriate composting facility or device in a timeframe consistent with other materials composted under the same conditions. If the product is compostable only in certain environments, qualifiers should be included.
- A general degradability claim should not be made unless the marketer has reliable evidence that the product or package will entirely break down and return to nature in all potential disposal environments. Appropriate qualifiers are needed. Degradability claims should not be so framed as to incite or condone littering.



### 15. Do you state or imply that the product or package is refillable or reusable?

- No product or packaging should be described as refillable or reusable unless it can be refilled or reused for the same or similar purpose and there is a reasonable means for the consumer to do so.



Read more about differences between the Mobius loop and material identification codes and how they are used in the ICC Framework on Environmental Marketing Communications.

## 16. Access to recycling

Must the consumer be able to access external facilities (e.g., recycling infrastructure, home composting, municipal composting, etc.) so that the claimed benefit can be achieved? If so, are these facilities reasonably available to the requisite number or proportion of users, consistent with local guidance?

- Limitations on the ability to, e.g., recycle or compost the advertised item should be clearly identified.



## 18. Have you conducted consumer perception research to assess how the claim will be perceived by consumers?

Remember that the evaluation of marketing communications, including advertisements featuring environmental claims, is based on the net impression of the reasonable consumer or target. Perception research is not mandatory; if not available, the evaluation will be based on a hypothetical assessment.

## 20. Is the claimed benefit likely to be realised when the product, component or package is actually manufactured, used or disposed?

- An ad that makes a claim about a feature or benefit that would not likely be achieved in the actual manufacture, use or disposal is likely to be misleading and/or deceptive absent appropriate qualifiers.

## 22. Do you use your own environmental seals or logos?

- If a consumer might interpret your own environmental seals and logos in environmental advertising to denote approval by an independent third party, it is likely to be misleading and/or deceptive.

## 17. Are your proposed claims comparative in nature?

If so, is the comparison to:

- An earlier version of the product, component or package?
- A competitive product, component or package?



**The basis for any comparison regarding environmental benefits, attributes or burdens should be clear and the conditions of use of the compared product, component or package substantially identical.**



## 19. If the claim is literally true, could it be misinterpreted to convey a broader benefit? Does it exaggerate the environmental benefit or features?

- Remember that the evaluation of advertisements, including advertisements featuring environmental claims, is based on the net impression of the reasonable consumer or target.

## 21. Does the claim involve an environmental commitment or goal that is aspirational in nature and not likely to be met until many years in the future?

- An aspirational claim requires that the company demonstrate that it has a reasonable capacity and methodological approach to meet the claimed commitment or goal.



## 23. Seals & logos

Do you use seals or logos of third-party organisations?

Are their procedures transparent? Are processes for standards adoption in line with recommendations of competition authorities? Will seals and logos be misinterpreted to connote broader environmental benefits than covered by the programme?

- **Independent seal organisations should adhere to fair processes in the development of standards. Failure to do so may implicate competition law considerations.**
- **Marketers should adhere to the standards and guidelines of the seal organisations in using a seal.**

## 24. Are appropriate qualifiers clear and prominent, and in close proximity to the relevant claim?

- Qualifiers should generally be presented in readable typeface in a location in close proximity to the claim.
- Consumers are now broadly accustomed to obtaining more information from visiting websites. However, qualifying information must be readily available in close association with the claim. Prompts encouraging consumers to visit a website for more information, or making QR codes and the like available, may be helpful to consumers, but they may not substitute for required qualifiers that must appear prominently and in close proximity to the claim.

**Qualification –**  
a clarification that accurately and validly describes the limitations of an environmental claim.



## 25. Reassessment

Do you periodically reassess the claim, especially a comparative claim, based on changed circumstances and developments to assure that it remains accurate and not misleading?

- Claims must be current and comparisons clear.



## 26. Training

Are in-house marketers and outside marketing agencies trained to understand legal requirements and recommended best practices in making environmental and sustainability claims?

- Training and education regarding good advertising practices is recommended for all marketing communications.



## 27. Expertise

Do individuals represented as environmental experts in marketing communications actually have the relevant education, training and experience in the field? If not (for example, if actors are portrayed), are appropriate qualifiers included? Do endorsements and testimonials related to environmental claims meet applicable guidelines for endorsements, and include material connection disclosures as needed?

