# ASA crackdown on greenwashing falters as firms persist with misleading environmental claims



Despite earlier warnings from the Advertising Standards Authority (ASA), several prominent companies have continued to engage in misleading advertising practices surrounding their environmental claims, a new investigation reveals. Greenpeace UK's investigative arm, Unearthed, highlights that companies like Virgin Atlantic, Renault, and Aqua Pura persist in promoting unfounded assertions about their products' ecological credentials, even after being censured for such actions.

The ASA has had a vocal stance against greenwashing, launching a crackdown in 2021 that led to the censure of 44 firms for making unverifiable environmental claims. It was intended that these measures would enforce accountability among advertisers. However, Unearthed's findings indicate that as recently as last week, at least five of these companies continued to post misleading ads, raising serious concerns about the effectiveness of the ASA’s oversight mechanisms.

According to the ASA's guidelines, any environmental claim must be supported by concrete evidence, while unqualified assertions—such as those declaring a product to be "sustainable" or "eco-friendly"—require a particularly high burden of proof. Unfortunately, the ASA has revealed that it lacks the power to impose financial penalties on non-compliant firms. Instead, its arsenal of sanctions includes publicly naming companies on its website, requesting the removal of misleading online ads, and using its own advertising budget to challenge non-compliance through promoted posts.

The repercussions of this lack of enforcement power are evident in Virgin Atlantic's recent social media strategy. The airline has kept pinned posts on platforms like Instagram and TikTok, promoting its claim of having completed the first transatlantic flight with “100% sustainable aviation fuel.” This continues despite a ruling nearly nine months ago by the ASA that indicated such claims misled consumers into thinking the fuel had no negative environmental impacts. In essence, the phrase "100% sustainable aviation fuel" can imply a degree of environmental responsibility that is not entirely accurate, leading the ASA to express concern over potential misinterpretations of carbon savings.

Renault, too, has come under fire for videos published on platforms like Facebook and YouTube, which claimed that its hybrid vehicles could achieve “up to 80% electric driving in the city.” A ruling in 2023 deemed this wording misleading, yet the company continued using these narratives. Other automotive manufacturers, such as MG, have similarly faced scrutiny. They advertised their hybrid models as producing “zero emissions,” a claim the ASA identified as misleading due to the realities of hybrid vehicle emissions when powered by fossil fuels.

The bottled water brand Aqua Pura was found to be promoting what it termed “NEW Environmentally Friendly Caps” on its website—a claim that should have been discontinued following ASA intervention three years earlier. Moreover, Easigrass, which produces synthetic grass, persisted in marketing its products as “eco-friendly and 100% recyclable” despite previous ASA warnings that there was no verifiable proof supporting such assertions.

An ASA spokesperson noted that the organisation remains vigilant in monitoring environmental claims made in advertisements, relying on advanced artificial intelligence tools to identify potentially misleading ads. They reported that adjustments were being made, with an aim of ensuring businesses adhere to stringent evidentiary standards.

However, responses from the companies indicate a pattern of minimised responsibility. Virgin Atlantic maintains its commitment to achieving net zero by 2050 while asserting that using sustainable aviation fuel is a critical step towards this goal. Renault stated that it takes its advertising responsibilities seriously and is investigating the issues raised. Meanwhile, Aqua Pura cited a recent restructuring that hindered compliance with ASA recommendations.

In an environment increasingly scrutinised for its environmental claims, the persistence of greenwashing presents significant challenges. Without stringent measures or penalties, the likelihood that companies will prioritise genuine sustainable practices over deceptive marketing remains in jeopardy. The ASA's focus on high-profile fast-tracked rulings indicates a growing push for accountability in advertising, but unless the agency can enforce its decisions more robustly, consumers may continue to be misled by unfounded green claims.

As this issue evolves, the expectations for transparency and substantiation of environmental assertions are greater than ever, with companies now facing grave reputational risks through persistent non-compliance.

### Reference Map

1. Paragraphs 1, 2
2. Paragraphs 3, 4
3. Paragraph 5
4. Paragraph 5
5. Paragraph 5
6. Paragraph 5
7. Paragraph 5

Source: [Noah Wire Services](https://www.noahwire.com)

## Bibliography

1. <https://www.theguardian.com/media/2025/may/14/firms-greenwashing-adverts-after-being-censured-uk-investigation-finds> - Please view link - unable to able to access data
2. <https://www.theguardian.com/media/2025/may/14/firms-greenwashing-adverts-after-being-censured-uk-investigation-finds> - An investigation by Greenpeace UK's Unearthed reveals that companies like Virgin Atlantic, Renault, and Aqua Pura continued to publish misleading environmental claims in their advertisements, despite previous censure by the Advertising Standards Authority (ASA). The ASA had previously identified 44 firms making unsubstantiated green claims, yet as recently as last week, at least five of these companies were still posting such claims. The ASA emphasizes the need for clear evidence behind environmental claims and highlights the reputational risks for companies ignoring these rules.
3. <https://www.ft.com/content/b14ac2a7-5c1b-4c2d-baa2-d9d00e284219> - The UK Advertising Standards Authority (ASA) banned a Virgin Atlantic advertisement for making misleading claims about the environmental benefits of sustainable aviation fuels (SAFs). The ad showcased a transatlantic flight powered entirely by SAFs, described as a significant step towards decarbonizing aviation. However, the ASA deemed that the phrase '100 per cent sustainable aviation fuel' misled consumers by suggesting the fuel had no carbon emissions or environmental drawbacks. This ruling is significant as it is the first instance of the ASA banning an ad over SAF-related claims, reflecting the agency's intensifying scrutiny over 'greenwashing' practices.
4. <https://www.standard.co.uk/business/business-news/virgin-atlantic-ad-banned-over-flight-100-sustainable-fuel-claim-b1175093.html> - Virgin Atlantic's advertisement promoting its 'Flight 100' as the first transatlantic flight using '100% sustainable aviation fuel' was banned by the Advertising Standards Authority (ASA). The ASA found that the ad was misleading, as it implied that sustainable aviation fuel had no carbon emissions or a wider environmental impact, which was not the case. The ruling marks the first time the ASA has banned an ad due to claims regarding sustainable aviation fuels, highlighting the agency's increasing focus on 'greenwashing' in the aviation industry.
5. <https://www.edie.net/asa-bans-virgin-atlantic-ad-over-misleading-claims-on-saf-use/> - The Advertising Standards Authority (ASA) upheld complaints against Virgin Atlantic over misleading environmental claims in its advertisement for 'Flight 100', the first commercial transatlantic flight using '100% sustainable aviation fuel' (SAF). The ASA ruled that the ad was misleading, as it implied that the fuel had no carbon emissions or environmental impact, which was not accurate. The ruling underscores the ASA's commitment to scrutinizing 'greenwashing' practices and ensuring that environmental claims in advertising are substantiated with robust evidence.
6. <https://www.petersandpeters.com/case/asa-upholds-complaints-against-virgin-atlantic-over-misleading-environmental-claims/> - In November 2023, Virgin Atlantic ran a radio ad promoting 'Flight 100', the first commercial transatlantic flight to use '100% sustainable aviation fuel' (SAF). The Advertising Standards Authority (ASA) upheld complaints that the ad was misleading, as it implied that the fuel had no environmental impact, which was not the case. The ASA emphasized the need for advertisers to provide clear and accurate information about the environmental impact of their products and services to avoid misleading consumers.
7. <https://www.theguardian.com/business/2023/mar/01/airline-green-adverts-banned-uk-lufthansa-asa> - The Advertising Standards Authority (ASA) banned Lufthansa's 'green' advertising campaign in the UK for misleading consumers. The campaign included claims about the airline's environmental initiatives, but the ASA found that the ads lacked sufficient evidence to substantiate the claims. The ruling highlights the ASA's commitment to ensuring that environmental claims in advertising are clear, accurate, and supported by robust evidence, and serves as a warning to other companies in high carbon-emitting sectors to avoid making unsubstantiated 'green' claims.