

FACT SHEETS

Unmasking Sustainability Myths

Sustainability messages influence our decisions every day — on product packaging, in advertisements, on social media, and in public discussions. But how reliable are these claims, and what information might be missing?

The ECOGAGE Fact Sheets explore common sustainability claims, assumptions, and misconceptions related to everyday choices. They help you understand the evidence behind sustainability messages, recognise trade-offs, and develop a more critical perspective on information that often appears straightforward at first glance.

Each Fact Sheet includes clickable references 

so you can explore the underlying evidence yourself. In addition, the ECOGAGE Resource Library provides access to a curated collection of trusted and verified sources that informed the development of our materials. The goal is not to tell you what to think — but to help you make informed decisions based on a fuller understanding of the facts.

Because critical thinking is one of the most important skills for sustainable living.



Scan the QR code to access the ECOGAGE Resource Library and explore the evidence behind the Fact Sheets.

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Critical Thinking for Sustainable Living

Unmasking Sustainability Myths

Food and Daily Consumption



Farm to table = bio/eco or is it just an illusion?

Vegan menu, 100% plant-based, soy-based meat alternative



To use or not to use plastic gloves in a supermarket? That is a question!

Healthy! Nutritious! Full of vitamins!



Clothing & Lifestyle

If I buy "sustainable" clothes, is it okay to buy more?



"Natural", "soft", "skin friendly" - But what actually touches your skin?

Clothes sold in the EU must be safe... right?



Mobility



Is commuting just wasted time? Or could your journey be the smartest part of your day?



Electric cars: The green solution, or just a new kind of problem?



Flying green? Or is short-haul flying greener only on paper?

Energy & household

New = Better? Or are you replacing your appliance too early?



Plastic-free = better? Or is glass not always the greener choice?



100% Renewable? Or is your electricity not as green as you think?



Doing all the right things... but are they the ones that really matter?

Labels & claims



The label jungle: What can you trust?



"Green", "eco", "natural" - What do they really mean?

Something is missing but what is it?



farm to table = bio/eco or is it just an illusion?

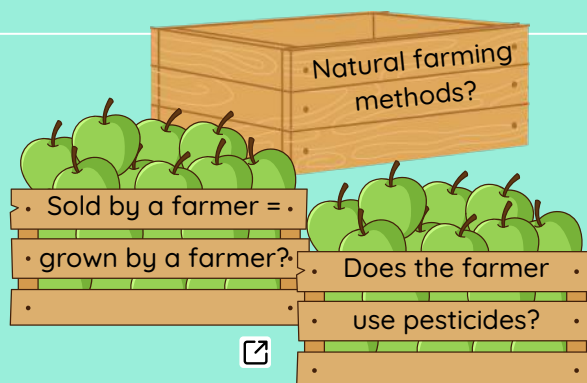


You buy vegetables from this nice couple at the farmers' market and you visit a farm to pick your own seasonal fruit - what could be healthier and more environmentally friendly than that?

“Sold by a farmer = Better”

How do you know you are making the best choice?

- Is all produce sold by this farmer actually grown by him/her?
- How does he protect the crops from pests?
- What exactly are neighbouring farms using for their crop protection?
- Do you understand that even if you pick your own fruit from a farm, the farmer may still have used pesticides or chemical products to speed up ripening?



Psychology behind our behaviours:

We tend to "spread" our trust coming from one characteristic of a person to all his/her characteristics or actions - you may have a real connection with the farmer or maybe the owner of the PYO farm is providing a nice picknick area but this does not automatically mean that the way vegetables are produced is environmentally friendly.

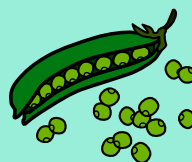


Key Takeaway

Vegetable production is tricky - you should look for: no synthetic pesticides or fertilizers ; crop rotation (better soil health) ; limited chemical inputs.

Act where it matters

If you want to be certain - join one of cooperatives where members order weekly fruit and vegetable supplies from verified producers but even there ask questions: How do they verify producers? Do the producers use intensive agriculture (higher CO2 emissions)?



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Food and Daily Consumption

Vegan menu, 100% plant-based, soy-based meat alternative

Did you know that animal-based food production generates 57% of food-system greenhouse gas emissions—about twice as much as plant-based foods, which account for 29%? 



You decide to choose a vegan restaurant to be more sustainable, but are you? Are plant based dishes always the best choice? Are animal products always more harmful for the environment? 

choosing plant based food -
saving the planet one tasty
bite at a time

“I am the
better
choice!”

Really?



How do you know you are making the best choice?

- Is every plant based dish environmentally friendly?
- Is soy on the menu always a better choice?
- Does lack of GMO mean a more sustainable product?
- Are all GMO products potentially harmful? 

How can you be sure? CHECK:

- **Where do ingredients come from?**
Soy linked to deforestation has a very different impact than locally sourced soy.
- **Transport and supply chains:**
Imported ingredients may increase environmental impact.
- **Level of processing:**
Highly processed vegan substitutes often require more energy and resources.
- **Farming methods:**
Water use, land use, and agricultural practices matter more than marketing labels.



Key Takeaway

A vegan menu can have a lower environmental impact — but sustainability depends on much more than simply avoiding animal products.

Think critically
before choosing



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To use or not to use plastic gloves in a supermarket? That is a question!



You are using plastic gloves or plastic bags to pick greens and bread to maintain some level of hygiene and as a courtesy to other shoppers but at the same time you are wondering if it is worth it since you are producing so much plastic waste?

What is more harmful?

- Using bare hands to pick fruit or producing waste from single use plastic?
- Trying to protect your hands from dirt while picking potatoes or carrots from a pile?
- Contaminate fruit you touch with your bare hands or harming the environment with plastic?
- And what about bakery products - how to pick them up?



Facts

Fruit and veggies:

- Pathogens on produce usually come from farming, transport, or storage, not the last person who touched it
- Any contamination from hands is typically removed by washing at home
- Gloves/plastic bags don't reliably reduce contamination unless changed constantly (which shoppers don't do).

Bakery products:

- Cross-contamination risk exists—but stores provide tools (tongs, paper) for a reason
- Gloves don't solve the issue if people still touch multiple items



Key Takeaway

Across all situations, research keeps landing on the same hierarchy:

- Hand hygiene (washing/sanitizing): high impact
- Not touching your face: high impact
- Using proper tools (tongs, bags): high impact

Gloves: low or inconsistent impact and YES - high environmental cost

What to do while shopping for:



Fruit & vegetables:

Use bare hands. Wash produce at home (this matters far more than gloves)



Meat products:

The main risk is leaking juices from packaging (can carry bacteria like Salmonella). Gloves can reduce direct contact—but only if removed immediately after



Bakery products:

Always use tongs or paper barriers. Avoid direct hand contact entirely. Gloves here: worse than just using proper tools

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Healthy!
Nutritious!
Full of vitamins!



What can be healthier and more sustainable than serving a glass of freshly squeezed orange juice?

“Have some juice - it’s good for you!”

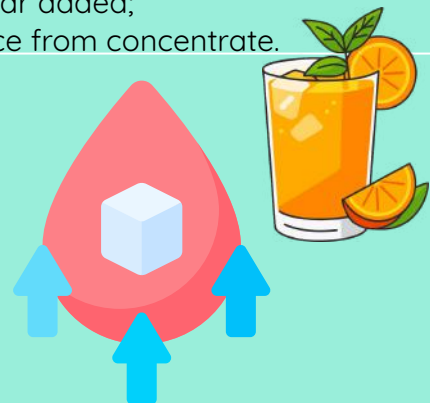


Facts or common belief?

- one gets more vitamins from juice than from a fruit;
- fruit juice is healthy as there are no added preservatives or sugar;
- smoothie is healthier than fruit juice;
- it’s a good way to start a day!
- 100% fruit juice means no sugar added;
- fruit nectar is the same as juice from concentrate.

What we know for a fact:

- Drinking juice (deprived of the fiber present in the whole fruit) will cause glucose spike.
- Still unsure of the sugar intake? You will hardly ever eat as many fruit at one sitting as you will use for one glass of juice - so do your maths yourself.



Key Takeaway

Eat the whole fruit - optimal choice would be fruit with a verified bio label otherwise soak it in bicarbonated soda/vinaigre and water; if you need to drink store - bought juice, make sure it has EU BIO label.

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If I buy “sustainable” clothes, is it okay to buy more?

“I chose the organic cotton version because it seemed like the responsible choice.”



What the labels don't tell you?

CLOTHES ARE BOUGHT FASTER THAN EVER



Clothing production **doubled** since 2000. Garments are worn fewer times before disposal.

BETTER MATERIALS $\neq$ ZERO IMPACT



Organic cotton reduces synthetic pesticides - but still uses water, land, and energy.

THE BIGGEST IMPACT IS OFTEN FREQUENCY



Replacing clothes quickly increases the total footprint - no matter the material.



Key Takeaway

A sustainable T-shirt still has an impact

The greenest clothes are often the ones already in your closet!

What can you do?

You can ask yourself:

- Do I really need this item?
- Will I wear it often and for a long time?
- Am I replacing something - or just adding more?



Focus on:

- buying less,
- wearing clothes longer,
- considering second-hand options,
- choosing durable products over constant novelty.

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“Natural”, “soft”, “skin friendly” - But what actually touches your skin?

“Natural fibers”

“Caring formula”

“Skin-friendly”

“Dermatologically tested”

“100% cotton”

“I buy cotton clothes and use fabric softener because they feel softer and gentler.”

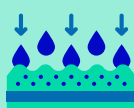


What really affects comfort and irritation?

FABRIC STRUCTURE MATTERS

COTTON

- Often more breathable
- Absorbs moisture well



SOME SYNTHETIC FABRICS

- May trap heat depending on their structure
- Not all synthetic materials behave the same
- Synthetic fabrics may release plastic microfibres during washing.



TREATMENTS AND RESIDUES MATTER TOO

Both natural and synthetic fibers may contain chemical residues, such as:



DYES



FINISHING TREATMENTS



FRAGRANCES



DETERGENT RESIDUES



Skin sensitivity can be linked to dyes, finishes, detergents, fragrances, and some fabric properties.



Breathability and heat retention depend on both fibre type and fabric structure.



Not all cotton is untreated or irritation free!



Key Takeaway

Soft, natural and breathable doesn't mean treatment free!

Your skin reacts to more than marketing words!

What can you do?

Check fabric care labels

They often list finishing treatments.

Wash new clothes before wearing

This can reduce residues from dyes and finishes.



Use mild or fragrance-free detergents when possible

Fragrances are a common cause of irritation.

Choose what feels comfortable for you

Everyone's skin reacts differently.

Less softener, more care

Softener leaves a coating that may irritate skin.

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Clothes sold in the EU must be safe... right?

"When I see clothes sold in the EU, I assume they meet all safety standards."

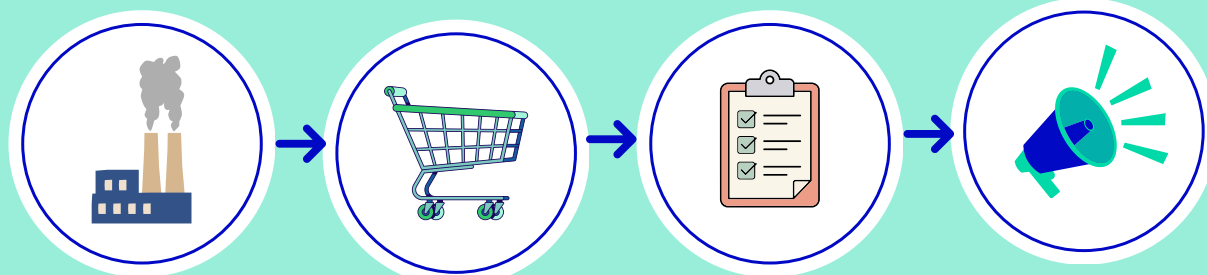
"EU COMPLIANT"

"QUALITY STANDARDS"

"SAFE"



How the system actually works?



MANUFACTURER

Produces the product and declares it compliant.

MARKET

The product is sold on the market.

SURVEILLANCE

Authorities perform spot checks, testing and inspections.

RECALLS

If a risk is found product may be removed or recalled.



Important to know

- Products are usually NOT
 - pre-tested,
 - individually approved.

Instead:

- Companies declare compliance.
- Authorities verify later through market surveillance.



Safety Gate

Alerts about unsafe products, including clothing, happen regularly in the EU.



Key Takeaway

"Sold in the EU" does not mean "individually checked".

Safety systems often react after products reach the market.



What can you do?

- Be cautious with unusually cheap and unknown brands.
- Check products information where possible.
- Be aware that recalls happen regularly.



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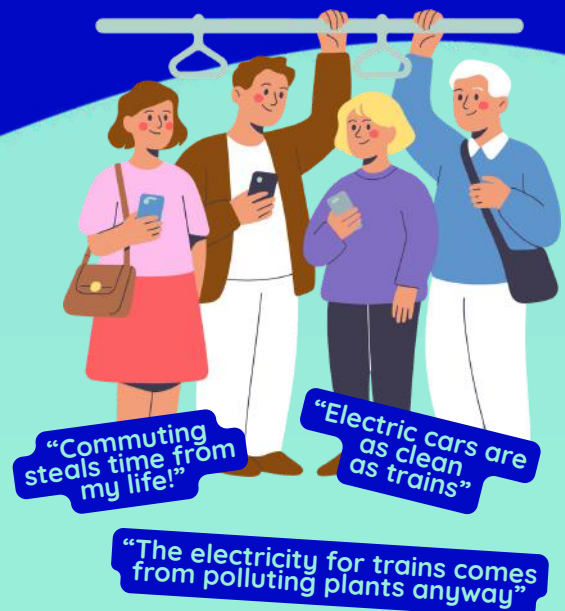
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Is commuting just wasted time? Or could your journey be the smartest part of your day?

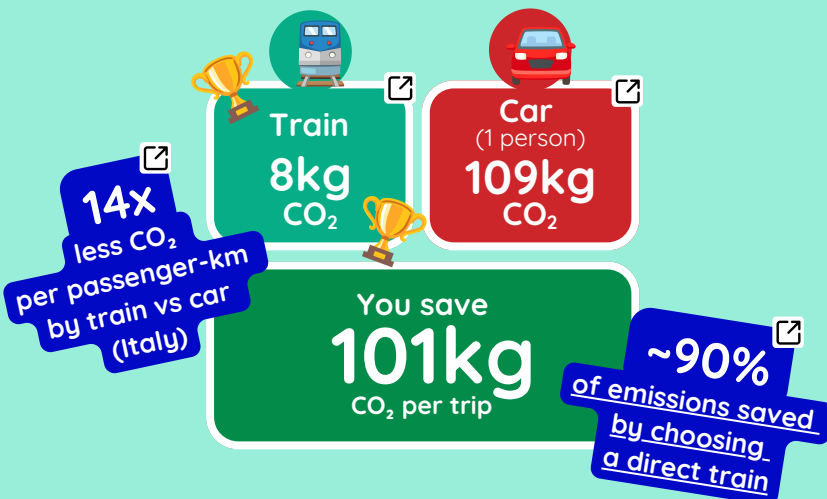
It feels like time you'll never get back

You spend 40 minutes **on a bus** or train every morning. It feels like dead time. Time stolen from sleep, hobbies, or family. And when someone says the train is greener, you wonder: **does it really matter?**

wasted time → no real difference vs driving → trains pollute too



What if commuting wasn't the problem, but how you commute?



Your commute isn't dead time. It's free time

Driving locks your attention on the road, that time is gone. On a bus or train, those 40 minutes become yours: **read, learn, listen, or rest.**



And it's not just about time. It's about impact

The numbers tell a different story. Trains emit up to **14x less CO₂** per passenger-kilometer.

Make the smarter trip



Choose the train if:

The route is over **100 km**, you're **traveling alone** or as **a couple**, and the destination is in the city center.



The car makes sense if:

You're a **group of 4** (splitting the impact) or the destination **isn't served** by public transport.



Key Takeaway

Public transport doesn't steal your time, it **gives you time back**. You gain twice: time for yourself, and a lighter footprint on the planet.

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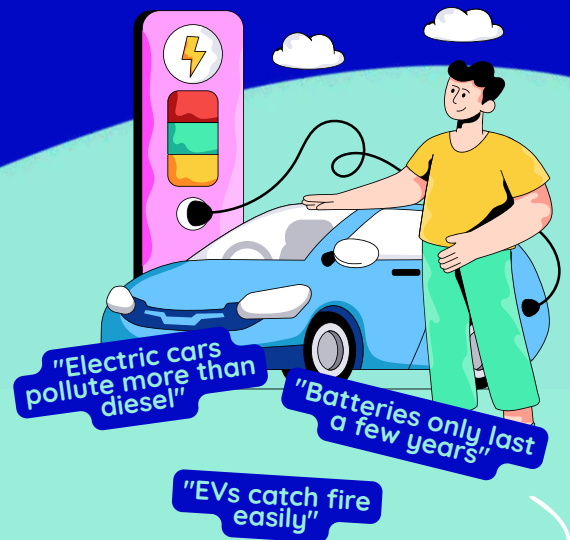
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Electric cars: The green solution, or just a new kind of problem?

Sounds like a no-brainer

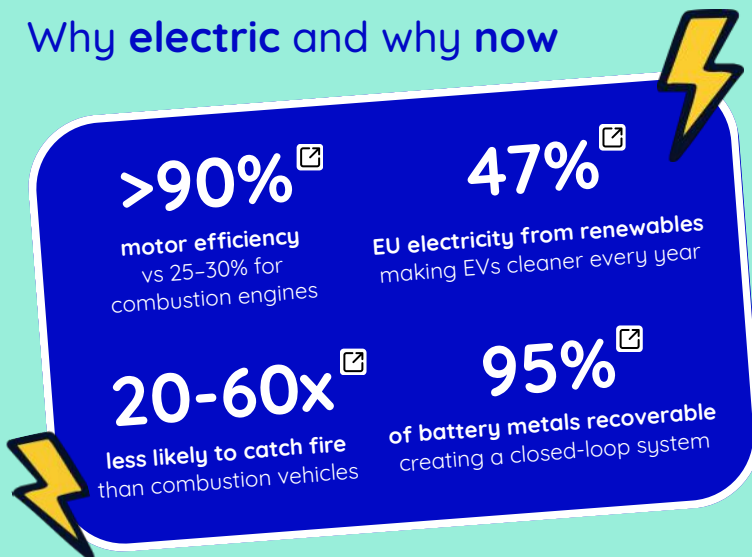
You buy an electric car. No exhaust fumes, no engine noise, no trips to the gas station. It feels like the obvious step toward a cleaner future.

Zero emissions → cleaner air → less dependence on oil



These concerns are real, but what was the problem electric cars were designed to solve in the first place?

Why electric and why now



✓ **Electric mobility wasn't chosen because it's trendy.**

It's the only existing technology that can **decarbonize road transport at scale**, improving urban **air quality** and wasting far **less energy**.

✓ **And unlike a gas car, an EV gets cleaner over time**

As the power grid adds more renewable energy, every electric car on the road automatically **reduces its footprint**.

Drive the change

Switching to electric is an **investment** in a new energy system.
To make the most of it:

1 Charge with renewable energy

Choose **certified** green electricity contracts to **maximize** your impact.

3 Support responsible recycling

Buy from manufacturers with **transparent** battery recovery supply chains.

2 Look beyond the sticker price

EVs have **lower maintenance** and **fuel costs**. Evaluate the Total Cost of Ownership (TCO)

AHA! **Key Takeaway**
The real question isn't whether to go electric, it's how fast we can make the system around it **truly sustainable**.

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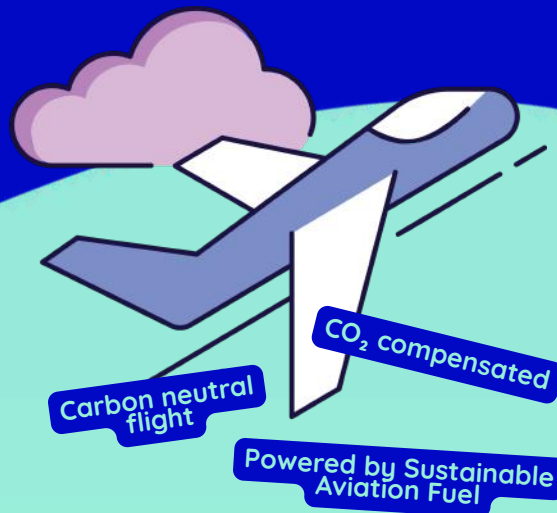
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Flying green? Or is short-haul flying greener only on paper?

It sounds like they've got it covered...

You need to fly from Milan to Barcelona for work.
The airline promises a **cleaner flight**.
The booking page is **full of reassuring labels**

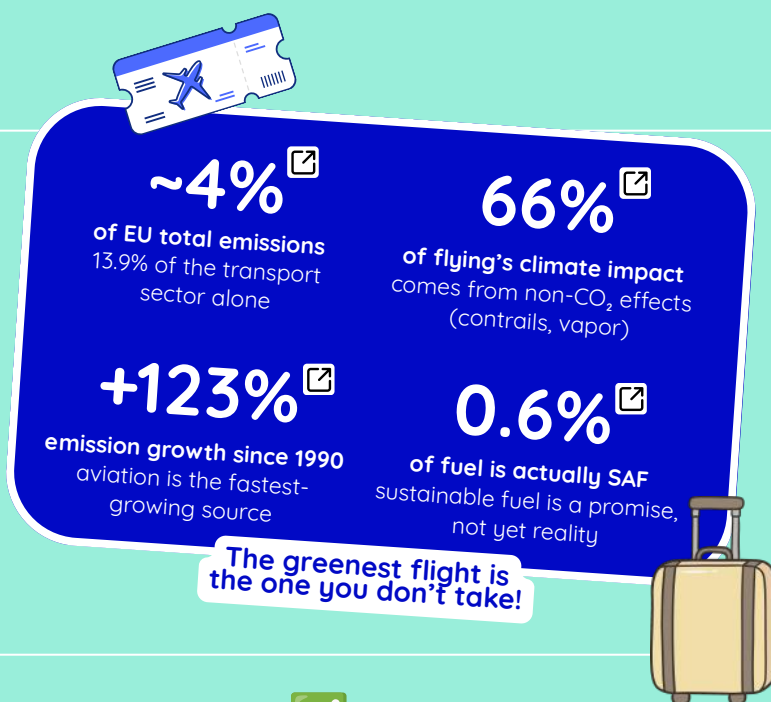
But does offsetting mean eliminating?
Are sustainable fuels actually widespread?



What the labels don't tell you:

! The real climate impact of flying goes far beyond CO₂.
Contrails, water vapor at altitude, and other non-CO₂ effects can account for up to **two-thirds** of aviation's total **warming impact**.

! And the "green" solutions? They're not keeping up
Sustainable Aviation Fuels sound promising but they represent a **tiny fraction** of what's actually used.



Fly less, fly smarter

You don't have to stop flying.
But you can **make it count**:

- ✓ **Prefer the train**
It emits **5 to 10 times** less.
- ✓ **Choose economy class**
Business class has a **much higher** per-seat footprint.

- ✓ **Fly only when necessary**
If a train or video call can replace the flight, **skip it**.
- ✓ **Offsetting is a contribution, not a solution**
It doesn't **erase the emissions**.
Reduce first, compensate second.



Key Takeaway
"Carbon neutral" labels don't mean zero impact, they mean the **real cost is hidden**.



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New = Better?

Or are you replacing your appliance too early?



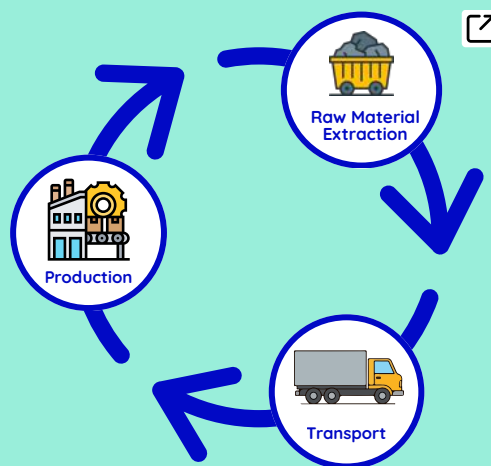
“New = Better”

You finally decide to replace your old washing machine or fridge. The new one is **more energy-efficient**, **uses less electricity**, and **promises better performance**.

Sounds like a sustainable choice. But is it really? Sounds logical... right?

That's only half the story

- Is replacing always the more sustainable option?
- Does a more efficient appliance really reduce your footprint—even if the old one is still working?
- What we often don't consider is when replacing actually makes sense.



What you don't see

Energy efficiency is only one part of the story. Before a **new appliance** is even used, it already has an **environmental footprint**:

- **raw materials** need to be **extracted**
- **production** requires **energy**
- products are **transported** across long distances 



This means: Replacing too early can cancel out the energy savings of a more efficient device.

In many cases, the environmental cost of producing a new appliance is higher than the savings it generates in the first years of use.

AHA!

Key Takeaway

The most sustainable appliance is often the one you don't replace yet.

Act where it matters

Use your appliances as long as they function well.

Consider replacing them only when:

- they are broken or close to failing
- they are significantly inefficient
- the efficiency gain clearly outweighs production impact

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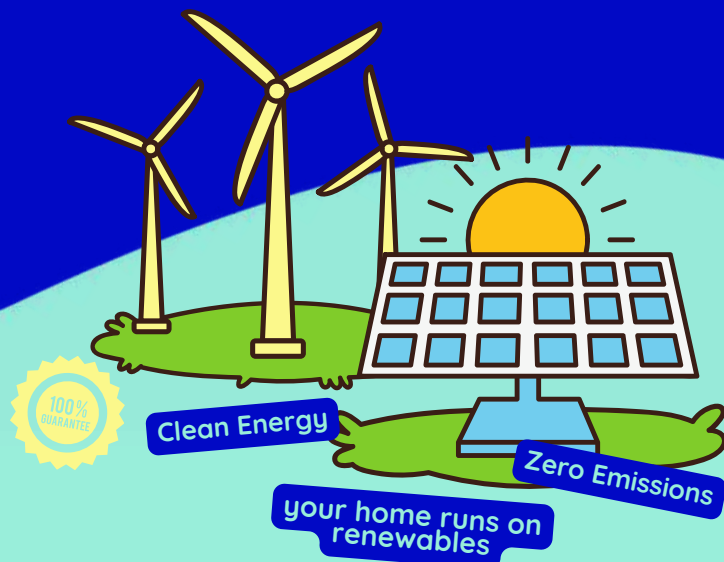


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100% Renewable? Or is your electricity not as green as you think?

Sounds convincing...

You switch to a green electricity tariff.
The provider promises “100% renewable electricity.”
It feels like a clear step towards a more sustainable lifestyle.
But what does that actually mean?



What's really happening behind the scenes?

Does “100% renewable” mean your home is powered only by green energy? Not exactly. **Electricity doesn't travel directly from a wind turbine or solar panel to your home.**

Instead, it flows through a shared grid, where renewable sources, fossil fuels and other energy sources are all mixed together.

This means: The electricity you use is always part of this combined system.

What the label really means

“100% renewable” often refers to certificates (**Guarantees of Origin**). These certificates confirm that renewable energy was produced somewhere - but not that it directly powers your home.

In practice: The system balances renewable energy on paper, not through a direct physical connection.



Where your choice really matters

Look beyond the label. Choose providers that:

- invest in new renewable energy projects
- operate their own renewable plants
- clearly explain how your tariff supports the energy transition

These providers actively contribute to expanding renewable energy— not just accounting for it.



Key Takeaway

“100% renewable” doesn't mean your electricity is physically green. What matters is whether your choice supports real change in the energy system.

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Plastic-free = better? Or is glass not always the greener choice?

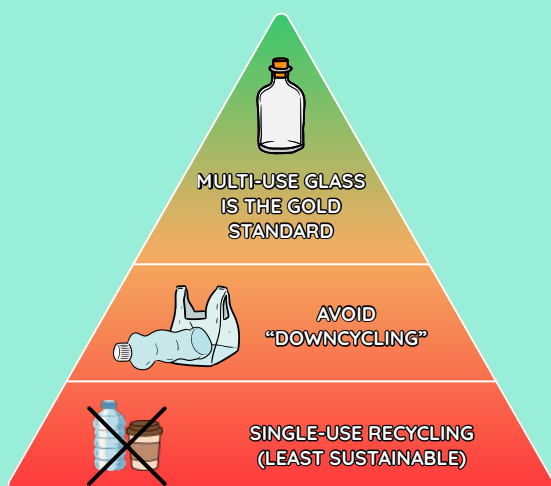


It feels like the obvious choice — but is it the full picture?

You choose a **glass bottle instead of plastic**. It feels like the obvious sustainable decision. Less plastic. More natural. Better for the environment. **But is it really that simple?**

It depends on more than just the material

Is avoiding plastic automatically the more sustainable option? Not necessarily. Materials like glass, plastic, and metal all come with different impacts— and **none of them is “better” in every situation.**



PLASTIC	PAPER	GLASS	METAL
Extremely light/waterproof	Lightweight but land-intensive	Extremely heavy to transport	Lightweight & durable
Hard to recycle, mostly downcycled	Renewable (Trees)	100% infinitely recyclable	Highly recyclable (but energy-intensive)
Fossil-fuel based	Requires high energy and chemical use	Energy-intensive to melt (Paradox)	Destructive mining & internal plastic lining

The part most people miss

What really matters is:

- how often a product is reused
- how far it is transported

A glass bottle only becomes the better option if it is **reused many times** and **transported over short distances**. Without reuse, or in long-distance systems, its overall impact can actually be higher than plastic.

Make the better choice

Focus on reuse, not just material. Choose:

- reusable packaging instead of single-use
- regional systems with **short transport** distances
- products designed for **multiple use** cycles

Avoid single-use packaging whenever possible no matter if it's plastic, glass, or metal.



Key Takeaway

The key question is not plastic vs. glass— but single-use vs. reuse.

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Energy & household

Doing all the right things...
but are they the ones that
really matter?



It feels like you're doing your part...

You switch off lights, try to save energy, and even wash dishes by hand to “do the right thing.”

It feels like you're making sustainable choices every day.

But are these actions actually making a **meaningful difference**?

👉 It seems logical:

- ↓ Do more
- ↓ save more
- reduce your impact

Not all actions have the same impact

Household energy use is highly uneven.

Most of the impact comes from:

- heating
- hot water
- large appliances

👉 Lighting, in comparison, usually plays a much smaller role.

The same applies to daily routines:

Some actions feel sustainable—but have **limited impact**.

Others seem less obvious—but **make a real difference**.

👉 Where your actions really matter

● High impact: Heating & hot water ●

- **lower room temperature**
- **shower length**
- **avoiding permanently tilted windows** during winter



● Medium impact: Appliances ●

- **eco-mode** on dishwasher & washing machine
- **air-drying** laundry instead of using a tumble dryer
- **avoiding a second refrigerator** or freezer
- **defrosting** freezers regularly



● Lower impact: Small habits ●

- **lights off**
- turning off devices **instead of** leaving them on **standby**
- **reducing screen brightness**



AHA!

Key Takeaway

It's not about doing more -
but about focusing on what
has the greatest impact.

Act where it matters

Start with what makes the **biggest difference**:

- **Lower room temperature** (−1°C)
- Use **less hot water** (shorter showers)
- Run **appliances efficiently** (full + eco mode)

👉 Quick reality checks:

- Dishwasher ✓ better than hand washing
- Lights ✓ good habit, but low impact
- Air-drying ✓ better than tumble dryer

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Labels & claims

“Green”, “eco”, “natural” - What do they really mean?



Familiar words, unfamiliar meaning...

You see these words everywhere. But terms like “eco-friendly”, “green”, or “natural” are often not clearly defined. **They suggest sustainability without explaining what is actually better**, how it is measured, or compared to what.

No clear definition → no measurable criteria → Open to interpretation

Greenwashing claims:

Companies often **make claims without a clear explanation**, so you need to ask the right questions and think critically to see what lies behind the surface.

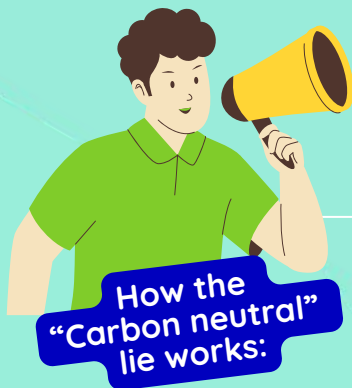
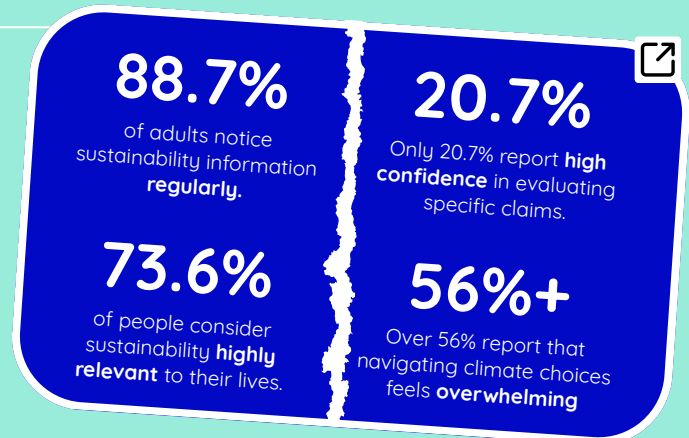
“Eco-friendly packaging” → What makes it eco?

“Green product” → Based on what criteria?

“Environmentally conscious choice” → Compared to what?

“Raised with care” → What does care mean?

“Sold by the farmer” → Is it a guarantee of quality?



What does a transparent claim look like?

- “Eco”/”Green”/”Natural”
- “Lower use of plastic”
- “30% less water usage compared to 2020 model, verified by...”

What is changing:

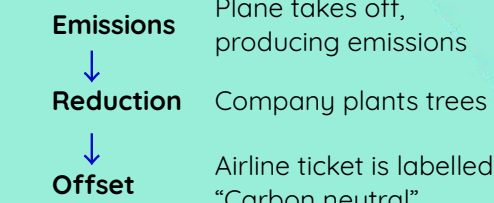
EU Directive 2024/825: ☒ Ending Greenwashing through Verifiable Communication

- **Ban on generic claims:** Words like “eco-friendly”, “green”, or “natural” are banned unless clearly proven.
- **Carbon Neutral Trap:** Companies cannot claim “climate neutral” or “CO₂ compensated” if they only pay for offsets. Real, proven emission reductions are required.



Key Takeaway

Companies must explain exactly what their claims mean in measurable terms.



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Labels & claims

The label jungle

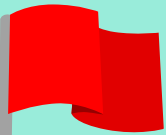
What can you trust?



Sustainability labels are everywhere – especially on packaging. But **not all labels are verified** or based on real standards. Some are independently certified. Others are created by companies to look official.

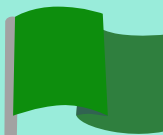
The problem? Almost 40% of cases involve misleading or fake labels.

Red and green flags of labels



What you should be aware of:

- No organisation behind the label.
- No criteria explained.
- No link to verification.
- Looks official but isn't

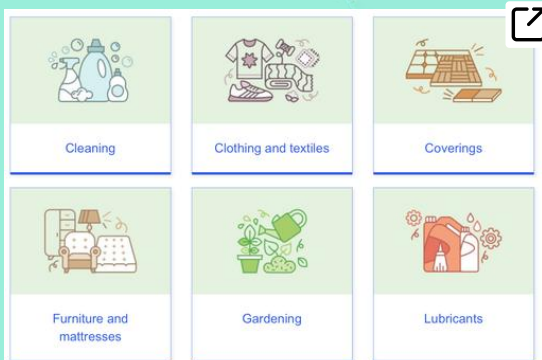


What to look for:

- Recognised **certification body**.
- **Transparent** criteria.
- **Verifiable** standards.



A credible source for ecolabels in Europe:



... and more!

Not sure if a sustainability label is genuine? This **official EU database** helps consumers verify ecolabels and find products that meet independently certified environmental standards.

Use the catalogue to:

- **Check** whether a label is linked to a recognised certification scheme.
- **Explore** certified products by category.
- **Verify** environmental claims instead of relying only on packaging or marketing.



Key Takeaway
Look out for the genuine labels

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Labels & claims

Something is missing but what is it?

Sustainability claims often highlight a single positive aspect while leaving out important information. This creates a **simplified, and sometimes misleading, picture**. Although sustainability information is everywhere, many people feel unsure how to evaluate it. As a result, **there is a gap between feeling informed and making confident decisions**.



What is stated

"Vegan product"
"Less plastic"
"Organic cotton"

"Recyclable packaging"

What is hidden

Not recyclable in your local system.

More energy used in production.

High water consumption.

High environmental impact.

The hidden reality

1 in 4 claim omit key information

Why it matters:
Incomplete information leads to wrong conclusions.

What can you do?

Consider using **this simple six-step checklist** whenever you're unsure about the truthfulness of a sustainability label:



Key Takeaway

You don't need perfect knowledge - just the **right questions**.



What exactly is being claimed?



Is the **benefit measurable**?



Is there **independent** proof?



Is it based on **real improvements** rather than offsets?



Does it apply to the **whole product**?



Will the product **last and remain repairable**?



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