Most building products these days have an environmental angle to their sales pitches. Many are legit, but as ever, you still have to watch for the telltale signs of greenwash—the practice of inventing or exaggerating the environmental benefits of a product.

### The 8 Shades of Greenwash

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**GW-001 Hammer On The Mount**

They’re ‘green by association’: simply by putting their products next to a green image like a sparkling stream or mountaintop vista, manufacturers give their products a green aura.

**GW-002 That Green Fuzzy Feeling**

Companies provide overly simplified information or undefined terms disguised as positive performance features. Even “recycled” and “recyclable” can be purposefully vague.

**GW-003 In Us We Trust**

Some claims are pretty specific but aren’t proven. Key information is hidden as “proprietary,” and impressive-sounding jargon may be used that can’t be backed up by third-party lab reports or certifications.

**GW-004 Blinding You With Science**

Some companies or trade associations provide plenty of data, but they fail to mention that their research methodology isn’t widely accepted or that data were selectively shared to make their products look superior.

**GW-005 Grains of Truthiness**

Specific and verifiable performance features get inflated into unverifiable claims that don’t follow logically and would require deeper study.

**GW-006 The Green Herring**

A company chooses one positive aspect of a product to highlight, like low carbon or recycled content, while ignoring other, more relevant environmental impacts.

**GW-007 Thin Patina**

It’s a classic bait-and-switch: a company markets a token super-green product but uses its green creds to attract buyers of business-as-usual items.

**GW-008 How Low Can You Logo**

A product earns an apparently valid third-party certification, but a trade association has influenced the standard’s development to make it relatively weak.

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**Who Greenwashes—And How Not To**

### Manufacturers:

- **Whether intentionally or not,** they serenade the green market with messages that may be inaccurate or out of context.
- **Instead:** Take time to understand the rules of the game, and create and market products that truly add value to green projects.

### Trade Associations:

- **In the perceived interests of their members,** they water down standards and testing requirements.
- **Instead:** Partner with environmental groups, using your expertise to steer standards to areas where you can define leadership, not a lowest common denominator.

### Third Parties:

- **To earn business and market share,** third-party certification organizations or laboratories can provide credibility to poorly conceived programs.
- **Instead:** Treat your credibility as your currency. Collaborate with other organizations to reduce noise in the market.

### Design and Construction Firms:

- **They tout their product selection as if a few recycled or low-VOC products constitute a green building.**
- **Instead:** Take pride not only in product selections but also in higher-impact strategies like reducing overall material use, choosing a walkable site, and using an integrative process to guarantee operational performance.