

Green Claims That Still Sell

By Christine Johansen · Published October 2, 2026

What the EU's new rules mean for outdoor and eco brand copy, and how to fix yours without losing your voice.

The short version

If you sell to shoppers in the EU, words like "eco-friendly" and "sustainable" are now a legal risk. So is "carbon neutral" when it rests on offsets.

The rules took effect on September 27, 2026. There was no grace period, and they cover products you made before that date.

Most of the fix is copy. The product is usually fine and the wording is the problem. The fix is a claim that says exactly what's true and shows where the proof lives.

Specific claims also sell better. "Made with 100% recycled nylon" gives a shopper something to believe. "Eco-conscious" gives them a shrug.

This guide covers what changed, which claims are in trouble, and how to rewrite them so they still sound like you. There's a 30-minute self-audit near the end.

What changed on September 27

The EU added a set of green marketing practices to its list of things that are always unfair to consumers. The law is Directive (EU) 2024/825. Most people call it EmpCo, short for Empowering Consumers for the Green Transition.

Here's what matters for a brand team.

- **It's already live.** The rules have applied since September 27, 2026.
- **There was no transition period.** The European Commission has said the rules cover products already made and already on shelves.
- **It covers everything a shopper sees.** Product pages, ads, emails, social posts, packaging, hashtags, and even brand and product names.
- **Where you're based doesn't get you out of it.** If you market to EU consumers, you're in scope.
- **Each country enforces it.** Every EU member state writes the rules into its own law, and some are running late. Timing is uneven, so check the countries you sell into.

One more thing. You may have heard the EU's Green Claims Directive stalled in 2025. That was a separate proposal. EmpCo passed in 2024 and nothing about it has been paused.

On packaging, regulators have been told to be proportionate. Stickers and corrections at the point of sale are accepted fixes for stock that's already printed. Your website has no such excuse, since it takes an afternoon to change.

Six kinds of claims that are now a problem

These are the six I see most on outdoor and eco brand sites. Chances are you'll spot at least two of your own.

1. The vague green word

"Eco-friendly." "Green." "Sustainable." "Planet-friendly." "Conscious." The law calls these generic environmental claims. They're banned unless the claim is spelled out clearly in the same place, or the product holds a top-tier ecolabel like the EU Ecolabel.

A link to your sustainability page three clicks away doesn't count. The detail has to sit with the claim.

2. The whole-product halo

"Recycled jacket" when only the shell is recycled. "Our sustainable collection" when one fabric earned it. If the claim is true of a part, it has to name the part.

3. Carbon neutral by offset

You can no longer say a product is carbon neutral, climate positive, or reduced impact because you bought offsets. A clear explanation doesn't save it. You can still talk about the projects you fund. You can't use them to call the product neutral.

4. The homemade badge

That little leaf icon your designer made for the "better choice" range. If an icon tells shoppers a product is greener or better for the planet, the law treats it as a sustainability label. Labels now need a real certification scheme behind them, with an independent third party doing the checking, or a public authority. In-house badges, scores, and tiers don't qualify. A leaf in your logo or as page decoration is a different matter. What counts is what a shopper would take the icon to mean.

5. The someday promise

"Net zero by 2040." "Fully circular by 2030." Future claims now need a public plan with measurable, time-bound targets and regular checks by an independent expert. A goal with no plan behind it counts as misleading.

6. The legal minimum dressed up

If the law already requires it of every product in your category, you can't sell it as your special thing.

A note on names. The Commission has confirmed that brand names and product names are covered too. An "EcoShell" jacket or a "Green Line" range makes a claim every time someone reads the label.

Who's checking

More people than you'd think, and most of them don't work for a government.

Regulators. Each EU country has a consumer authority that can investigate and fine. The Dutch regulator was early. In 2022 it found H&M's "Conscious" and Decathlon's "Ecodesign" labels too vague. Both brands agreed to change or drop them, and donated €500,000 and €400,000 to sustainability causes.

Campaign groups. In Germany, the environmental group Deutsche Umwelthilfe took Adidas to court over its "climate neutral by 2050" claim. In March 2025 the court ruled the claim misleading, because Adidas hadn't said whether offsets were part of the plan. These rules didn't even apply yet.

Competitors. In several EU countries a rival brand can take you to court over an unfair claim. If your "sustainable" jacket sits next to theirs, they have a reason to.

Consumer groups. Qualified organizations can bring collective actions on behalf of shoppers.

Web copy tends to go first. It's public, it's easy to screenshot, and nobody can argue it was too costly to fix.

On fines, the numbers vary by country. For cross-border cases handled jointly by EU authorities, countries must be able to fine at least 4% of a brand's annual turnover in the countries involved.

A public ruling with your name on it can cost more than the fine. Your customers bought from you because they trusted you.

Rewrites that keep the selling power

Most compliance guides stop at "delete the claim." That leaves you with flat copy and a brand that sounds like everyone else.

You don't have to go quiet. A specific claim is more convincing than a vague one, because the shopper can picture it.

The examples below are made up, but you'll recognize the type. Swap in your own facts. The rewrite only works if every detail in it is true and you can prove it.

Before	After	What changed
Our most eco-friendly rain shell yet.	Shell fabric made from 100% recycled nylon. Water repellent with no PFAS added.	Two facts replace one feeling.
Sustainable merino base layers.	Merino certified to the Responsible Wool Standard.	The certificate does the talking.
Recycled fleece.	Body fabric made from 100% recycled polyester. Zips and trims aren't there yet.	Names the part. The honesty helps.
Carbon neutral shipping on every order.	Every order funds mangrove planting in Kenya. Shipping still has a footprint, and we publish ours.	Keeps the good deed. Drops the neutral claim.
Net zero by 2040.	We've cut our emissions 18% since 2022. Our plan and yearly progress are public and independently checked.	Progress you can show beats a promise you can't.
Plastic-free packaging, because we love the planet.	Ships in a mailer made from 100% recycled card. No plastic bag inside.	Says what the shopper will find when they open it.
The EcoTrail 30 pack.	The Trail 30 pack, made with 70% recycled ripstop.	The claim moves out of the name and into a fact.
A leaf icon labeled Planet Pick.	The certifier's own label, linked to the certificate.	A badge with someone independent behind it.

Four rules behind every rewrite

1. **Name the part.** Say which fabric, which component, which step.
2. **Give the number.** A percentage or a named standard beats any adjective.
3. **Put the proof next to the claim.** Same page, same label, same ad. A link or a QR code to the detail is fine as backup.
4. **Keep your voice everywhere else.** The law cares about the claim. The joke about soggy socks is all yours.

That last one matters most. Here's a product line with the voice left in.

Built for the trail days when the forecast lied. Shell fabric made from 100% recycled nylon, with no PFAS added.

The first sentence is brand. The second is a claim. Only the second needs proof.

A 30-minute self-audit

Grab a coffee and open your site. You're looking for claims a stranger could screenshot.

Search your own site (10 minutes)

- ☐ Search for eco, green, sustainable, conscious, planet, responsible, and clean
- ☐ Search for carbon neutral, climate neutral, net zero, and climate positive
- ☐ Search for biodegradable, natural, and non-toxic
- ☐ Note every page where one shows up

Check the top five pages (10 minutes)

- ☐ Homepage headline and hero image text
- ☐ About or sustainability page
- ☐ Your three best-selling product pages
- ☐ For each claim, ask whether the proof is on the same page
- ☐ For each claim, ask whether it's true of the whole product or one part

Check the things people forget (10 minutes)

- ☐ Badges and icons you designed in-house
- ☐ Product, collection, and range names
- ☐ Any goal with a year attached to it
- ☐ Paid ads and email footers
- ☐ Listings on retailer and marketplace sites that reuse your copy

If you found fewer than five, you're ahead of most brands. If you found thirty, you're normal.

What to fix first

You don't need to fix everything this week. Work in this order.

1. **Offset-based neutral claims.** These have no safe version. Remove them from products today.
2. **Homepage and top product pages.** Most visible, most likely to be screenshotted, fastest to change.
3. **Paid ads and email.** They carry your claims to people who never see the fine print.
4. **Homemade badges and labels.** Swap them for a real certification or take them down.
5. **Future goals.** Either publish the plan and get it verified, or talk about progress you've already made.

6. **Names.** A product or range name with "eco" or "green" in it takes longer to change. Start the conversation now.
7. **Packaging and hangtags.** Fix the next print run. Use stickers or point-of-sale notes for stock that's already out.

Then write it down. A one-page claims guide for your team keeps the old words from creeping back in with the next product launch.

Who wrote this, and what to do next

I'm Christine Johansen, a content strategist and copywriter for outdoor and eco-focused brands.

I've spent over six years writing in places where one wrong sentence costs something. That includes building a claims-safe content framework for a biotech client, where legal checked every line. I've also written for outdoor brands, so I know what it takes to keep a brand voice fun while the facts stay straight.

If the self-audit turned up more than you expected, send me one page. I'll tell you which claims are at risk and how I'd rewrite them. No pitch, no pressure.

You'll find me at christinejohansen.com.

Sources

- [Directive \(EU\) 2024/825, full text](#)
- [Freshfields on the rules taking effect and the Commission's position on existing stock](#)
- [Linklaters quick guide to scope, banned practices, and fines](#)
- [Ashurst Perkins Coie on non-EU companies and existing stock](#)
- [Cooley on banned claims and collective actions](#)
- [Heuking on the Commission's FAQ, including brand and product names](#)
- [CSR Tools summary of the Commission's FAQ](#)
- [ClimatePartner on which countries have passed the rules](#)
- [Carbonfact on fashion claims and the H&M and Decathlon cases](#)
- [bluesign on labels and certification](#)
- [Coverage of the Adidas ruling](#)
- [Dutch regulator ACM on the H&M and Decathlon commitments](#)
- [ESG Post on the Adidas ruling in Nuremberg](#)

This guide is general information for marketing teams. It isn't legal advice. For a ruling on a specific claim, talk to a lawyer who works in EU consumer law.