

Verifying sustainability claims: clothing companies contacted by ACM

04-05-2021 - The Netherlands Authority for Consumers & Markets (ACM) starts an investigation into misleading sustainability claims in the clothing, energy and dairy sectors. The organization has asked a total of 170 companies to check their claims for correctness. More than 70 large clothing companies have been contacted in the clothing sector

ACM chose these sectors because in those sectors sustainability plays an important role for consumers when purchasing products and because the organization saw many potentially misleading claims during preliminary investigations.

Correct sustainability claims help consumers to make sustainable choices when purchasing products and services and counter unfair competition from companies. It is important that claims are not misleading, for example by exaggerating sustainability benefits.

Clothing sector

More than 70 large clothing companies have now received a letter from ACM. Examples of claims that ACM came across here are:

- A clothing company uses the claim "Organic cotton T-shirt", while the T-shirt only consists of 50% organic cotton;
- On a website you can filter the offer by "sustainability". Consumers who use this filter will see all garments labeled "sustainable choice". But the webshop does not state what is sustainable about the items shown.

ACM calls on the companies addressed to check their sustainability claims and to adjust them based on the rules of thumb if necessary. This applies to both products sold online and offline and products sold by resellers. From June 14, ACM will monitor the effect of this action and publish the results. To companies that mislead consumers with claims they cannot substantiate, ACM can impose a fine of up to € 900,000 per violation or a percentage of turnover.

Correct claims

Sustainability claims must be presented in a clear, concrete, correct and unambiguous manner to ensure that consumers are not misled about the sustainability of products or services. The information is divided into the claim itself, its specification, the explanation of the substantiation and the supporting evidence.

Specification

At least the specification must be visible immediately with the claim. This means, at the same place as the claim on the website and/or the clothing label. A specification means that it is immediately clear for consumers what the sustainability benefit of the product is. Displaying a logo or quality mark is not enough to make general claims concrete.

One click of the mouse

Subsequently, the explanation of the substantiation of the claim may not be more than one click away from the claim. This means that, through a link, the consumer will be taken directly to the page where an explanation is given about the substantiation of the claim. For physical products, the explanation of the substantiation must be on the clothing label, and the clothing label refers to a more extensive substantiation on a website, with a link to the substantiation page. For example: the term organic cotton must



at least provide substantiated information about the cotton used and why it is organic. Furthermore, it must be explained what the sustainability benefits of organic cotton are.

Findable evidence

The supporting evidence of a claim, such as a report, may be in a different place. For example in another place on the website, on another website or it may be retrievable. Consumers must be clearly informed about the location of this information when explaining the substantiation.

Support

Modint supports its members in communication and transparency. If your company has received a letter from ACM, or if you have any questions about this subject, please do not hesitate to contact [Miriam Geelhoed and Nikki Bosboom](#)

Want to read and know more?

Earlier this year, Modint already informed its members about monitoring sustainability claims and about the five rules of thumb from the ACM guideline. [Read more](#)

Easily share sustainability data with GS1 Fashion Base - [Read more](#)

On the agenda: Due Diligence & Public Communication: How to be honest, clear, correct and relevant (Free for Modint Purchase and Production CR members) and en AGT signatories [Read more](#)