

## Consumer groups fight greenwashing

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Denmark linked its name indefinitely to the environment in the wake of the COP15 climate conference, but consumer organisations are keeping tight tabs on companies' environmentally friendly claims.

National consumer ombudsman Henrik Øe has introduced new guidelines aimed at making it more difficult for companies – especially those involved in environmental and ethical areas – to make false claims to their customers.

The Danish Consumer Council and various industry organisations will now hammer out the final details of the new rules, which will include requiring companies to document that they are in the top third of the 'green' market before they can advertise themselves as sustainable or environmentally friendly.

'The goal of the new rules is to make life easier for the companies who really make an effort in the environmental and ethical fields and, conversely, more difficult for the companies that cheat,' Øe said.

The ombudsman added that there was especially a need for stronger rules in the oil, car and airline industries, where

numerous unsubstantiated claims are made about carbon neutral travel.

Claus Jørgensen, environmental policy advisor with the consumer council, said that consumers need to be able to trust the green message being presented by companies.

'If there are too many examples of cheating, the false messages undermine the consumers' trust that there's something beneficial about choosing green products,' he said.

A recent study from US environmental marketing company Terra Choice found that 98 percent of products it examined that were marketed as green were guilty of 'greenwashing'.

The term greenwashing is applied to companies that use marketing spin to make their products appear more environmentally friendly than they actually are.

The National Consumer Agency has also carried out its own studies to test the strength of the environmental factor among Danish consumers, finding that 72.8 percent of consumers have been at the receiving end of climate-friendly product marketing.

Of those, 43.3 percent said that they believed the marketing to be trustworthy.