The Consumer Voice in Europe

Press Release

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Danone, Nestlé and Coca-Cola commit to address greenwashing in response to BEUC complaint

Today, the European Commission announced that Danone has agreed to change some of its labelling practices, the last company flagged in BEUC's greenwashing complaint to do so. BEUC and its members denounced Coca-Cola, Nestlé and Danone in November 2023, with the support of Client Earth and ECOS, for including misleading recyclability claims in bottled water. Until now, only Coca-Cola and then Nestlé had committed to make changes.

All three traders have now committed to specify that '100%' recycling claims exclude the cap and the label. The bottle makers have also agreed to avoid giving the impression of a closed recycling loop and to ensure that neither the label nor the marketing mislead consumers on the environmental benefits of plastic bottles.

BEUC welcomes Danone's move. We now expect the three traders to comply with their commitments and call on authorities to take actions if they don't, to ensure consumers are no longer tricked by misleading recycling claims.

Consumer groups remain committed to carefully monitor whether the traders roll out the announced changes.

BEUC Director General Agustín Reyna commented: "It is great news that the three companies flagged by consumer organisations, Danone, Nestlé and Coca-Cola, have now committed to changing their practices to stop misleading consumers about the recyclability of their products. Consumers need to be able to trust companies' environmental claims. Danone's decision to clarify, as the other traders, that its '100%' recycling claims apply only to certain parts of the bottle is a good move for consumers who are concerned about of plastics polluting our soils, rivers and oceans."

"Presenting a bottle as 100% recycled or recyclable is simply misleading and must stop, as must the green imagery that suggests that plastic drink bottles have no environmental impact."

We expect the authorities to check that all three traders follow through on its promises, and to take firm action if they do not.

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Background

In November 2023, BEUC and member organisations from 13 countries, in close cooperation with ClientEarth and ECOS, reported to EU consumer authorities (the CPC-Network) misleading commercial claims about the recyclability of their products by major drinking water bottle traders, such as Coca-Cola, Danone and Nestlé Waters/Nestlé.

The action was coordinated by national consumer protection authorities in Hungary and Sweden.

According to our analysis, such claims do not comply with the EU rules on unfair commercial practices. We identified three key claims of concern:

- **"100% recyclable":** This ambiguous term depends on many factors such as the available infrastructure to collect material, the effectiveness of the sorting process, or appropriate recycling processes.
- **"100% recycled":** Bottle lids cannot be made of recycled materials by EU law and labels are rarely made from recycled material either. In addition, adding virgin plastic (i.e., non-recycled plastic) to the body of the bottle is also a common practice.
- **Use of green imagery:** Closed loops, green logos or nature images prompt the false idea of environmental neutrality.

The recycling rate for PET bottles is estimated to be only 55% in the EU and the chance of it becoming a bottle again around 30%.

Click here to find BEUC's dedicated page on our 'Unbottling greenwashing' action.

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