Environmental issues and greenwashing

So far in this unit we have discussed the positive attitudes companies have adopted towards the environment, let us consider now their negative impact.

Businesses and industrial organisations have an impact on the environment because they are all involved to different degrees in the production of industrial waste, the use of resources and the increase in pollution levels. In fact, even though businesses can contribute to technological improvement or the general well-being of a community, they can also have a harmful effect on the environment.

Impact of business and industry on the environment

Industrial waste is a result of the manufacturing process. Untreated waste, especially in the case of wastewater, can cause serious environmental problems, as in the case of groundwater, reservoir or land pollution caused by hazardous materials that contaminate the soil. There are laws to prohibit the indiscriminate dumping of manufacturing by-products and some companies implement recycling programs; others sell their waste to other manufacturers who use them in their processes as raw materials.

- **Consumption of raw materials**. Most companies use or consume resources and raw materials which are not unlimited and which cannot be recycled. In some cases, when the raw materials are natural, as in the case of wood for example, there are laws in place that require a business to take measures to replace what they use.
- **Air and water pollution** are another threat for the environment, especially when the emissions include chemical smoke, ash and chemical substances that seep into the ground. Industries should protect the environment from exposure, that's why some companies place screens over smokestacks or filtrate wastewater.
- **Radiation and noise**. Exposure to both ionising radiation, e.g. x-ray machines, and non-ionising radiations, e.g. electrical installations and mobile broadcasting centres, are very risky for the natural world and for human health. As regards noise, for example, a prolonged exposure can cause physical and mental harm to people and animals.

While some companies take these problems seriously and attempt to solve them, others either comply with the minimum legal requirements, ignore the problem or engage in greenwashing.

Greenwashing

The general idea behind **greenwashing** is to create a benefit for the company by appearing to be green. In fact, greenwashing is when a company promotes green initiatives or products but actually operates in a way that is damaging the environment or in an opposite manner



ash: *cenere*
by-product: *sottoprodotto*
dumping: *scarico*
greenwashing: *ecologismo di facciata*
groundwater: *acqua di falda*
harmful: *dannoso*
industrial waste: *rifiuti industriali, scarti di lavorazione*
press release: *comunicato stampa*
reservoir: *bacino idrico*
to seep: *filtrare*
smokestack: *ciminiera*
unwilling: *riluttante*
wastewater: *acque reflue*

The Green Planet - Copyright © EDISCO Editrice - Vietata la vendita e la diffusione

to the goal of the announced initiative. The tools used by greenwashing may include press releases about green projects, task forces put into place, energy or pollution reduction efforts, or rebranding of consumer products and advertising materials. However, in reality the company may be operating in damaging ways or may simply be unwilling to make a meaningful commitment to green initiatives.



1 Choose the best option.

1. … companies have an environmental impact.
   - **a.** Most
   - **b.** All
   - **c.** Some
2. Companies … contribute to technological improvement.
   - **a.** always
   - **b.** may
   - **c.** do not
3. Companies … use waste from other companies as raw materials.
   - **a.** never
   - **b.** do not
   - **c.** may
4. Land pollution is … caused by hazardous materials.
   - **a.** always
   - **b.** sometimes
   - **c.** never
5. Laws require companies to…
   - **a.** stop cutting trees.
   - **b.** replace the trees they cut.
   - **c.** plant trees.
6. X-ray machines produce…
   - **a.** ionising radiations.
   - **b.** non-ionising radiations.
   - **c.** electrical radiations.
7. Greenwashing is beneficial for…
   - **a.** consumers.
   - **b.** the environment.
   - **c.** the company which uses it.



2 PAIR WORK Read this list of green initiatives which offices could adopt and put them in the correct category. Then, add an example for each category.

1. Switching off computers and other machinery at the end of the day.
2. Keeping the heating down, e.g. no more than 20° C.
3. Using new energy saving light bulbs.
4. Using LCD monitors.
5. Not printing every email that they send or receive.
6. Using recycled paper.
7. Throwing rubbish in the appropriate recycling bins.
8. Using reusable materials when possible.

Recycle	Reuse	Reduce

The Green Planet - Copyright © EDISCO Editrice - Vietata la vendita e la diffusione

3 PAIR WORK **Here is a list of the top ten environmental issues that businesses can have an impact on. Decide on the level of responsibility (high/medium/low) that single business organisations may have on each of the following issues.**

1. Climate change .....
2. Energy .....
3. Water .....
4. Biodiversity and land use .....
5. Chemicals, toxics, and heavy metals .....
6. Air pollution .....
7. Waste management .....
8. Ozone layer depletion .....
9. Oceans and fisheries .....
10. Deforestation .....

The Green Planet - Copyright © EDISCO Editrice - Vietata la vendita e la diffusione