

## Big Beauty Bets on Standardised Eco-Scores. Will It Pay Off?

L'Oréal, Nivea and Neutrogena are rolling out new environmental labelling in a bid to stay ahead of anti-greenwashing regulations and give them an edge with consumers.

By Sarah Kent



For more than a quarter of a century, Nivea's Q10 anti-aging products have been a drugstore staple. The affordably priced day cream has an army of dedicated fans, who swear by its wrinkle-reducing properties and ultra-affordable price point. Now Nivea wants to sell them on its climate credentials too.

The brand is part of a cohort of first-mover beauty businesses rolling out new eco-score labels on select products in key European markets, starting with shampoos, conditioners, body washes and face care. The labels, which rate products from A to E, are the result of a years-long effort by some 70 global beauty brands and associations to develop a single system for measuring and communicating environmental impact.

The goal is to give consumers a clear, transparent and consistent way to compare products amid a confusing proliferation of "clean," green and natural marketing claims that have drawn increasing scrutiny from regulators and consumer watchdogs.

Many brands that once boldly promoted their products' climate credentials have quietly backed away from such claims as concern and skepticism around greenwashing has grown. A political backlash against so-called "woke capitalism" led by the US has also made it more complicated for consumer goods companies to talk about environmental and social issues.

But major players in the beauty industry are still betting that clear and credible green labels can keep them ahead of anti-greenwashing regulations and give them an edge with consumers.

Alongside Nivea, brands including L'Oréal Paris, Neutrogena and Eucerin will display the scores on the webpages for select skincare products in markets including the UK, France, Germany and Spain. More brands are expected to start using the labels in the coming months and more product categories will be added over time.

"We want to compare apples to apples so the consumer is in a position of really making a conscious choice," said Anke Pilzner, global claim advisor at Beiersdorf, Nivea's parent company. "All these claims that are now listed on the packaging are overwhelming... at the moment it's very difficult to say what is better for the environment."





## “Clean,” Green and Out of Control

Over the last decade or so, consumers have been bombarded with a growing proliferation of sustainability-related marketing claims. “Clean” and “natural” beauty products promise an array of skin-kind benefits and hint at environmentally friendly attributes, while remaining vague.

Shoppers can pick from vegan products in recyclable or recycled packaging that may or may not also be biodegradable. They can seek out brands and retailers that have qualified for a variety of third-party sustainability certifications, or simply created their own.

Consumers, confused by the array of sustainability claims displayed on shop shelves, are increasingly skeptical and disengaged. Regulators, especially in Europe, have pressed for brands to make it easier for consumers to compare products’ environmental performance and ensure any green claims are robust and substantiated.

Three years ago, a consortium of some 70 beauty brands and industry associations got together to try and figure out a solution, forming the non-profit EcoBeautyScore Association. Its mission: to develop an industry-wide environmental scoring system that would allow brands to provide clear, credible and comparable information about their products’ impact. Now the first products bearing those labels are hitting shelves.

The effort is not without jeopardy. When the fashion industry tried to launch a similar programme back in 2021, it sparked a string of greenwashing allegations and ballooned into controversy. Regulators in Norway concluded the chosen ratings system was not robust enough to back up big brands’ eco-marketing claims. The labels were withdrawn, and the credibility of fashion’s climate commitments took a hefty and enduring hit.

The EcoBeautyScore Association says it has taken steps to avoid repeating such mistakes. It also has the benefit of several years of broader alignment around how environmental impact should be measured. The organisation’s methodology is based on a framework developed and approved by the European Commission (though this system, too, is not without its critics, who argue it is not comprehensive enough and often relies on underlying data of dubious quality). Throughout development, the EcoBeautyScore Association engaged closely with policymakers in Brussels to ensure alignment, consulted with independent external experts and turned to established third-party databases to underpin its calculations. Where data for key beauty ingredients didn’t exist, it developed new datasets.

“There was strong awareness that we would be scrutinised by various types of stakeholders,” said EcoBeautyScore’s managing director, Jean-Baptiste Massignon. “They had to really invest and develop a methodology that would be fair, transparent and auditable... It took longer than planned, but it really started from a blank sheet of paper.”

## Who Cares?

Developing a scoring system regulators, consumers and advocacy groups will treat with some level of trust is just step one. The real test is whether shoppers will care enough about a products’ environmental rating for it to influence their purchasing decisions.

The jury’s out. There are certainly plenty of studies and surveys that suggest shoppers do want to buy products they can trust were made in an environmentally and socially responsible way, but actual consumption habits suggest this is rarely the first consideration when buying an item. Other types of labelling intended to influence consumption habits in a more virtuous direction have had mixed results.

For instance, introducing calorie counts on food menus and product labels only has a modest influence on what people eat, according to a review of multiple studies on the topic published at the start of the year. It quantified the resulting calorie reduction as the equivalent of two almonds.







Policymakers' dedication to the topic is also less clear than even a few months ago. A rightward shift in Europe's parliament, which has led the push to impose tougher environmental standards on businesses, means many of those moves could now get rolled back. Last month, the future of a landmark piece of anti-greenwashing legislation was thrown into doubt after the European Commission put out a confusing series of statements flip-flopping about whether it was still on the agenda.

"The north star of EcoBeautyScore is providing the information to the consumer," said Massignon. "The regulatory landscape at present is in kind of a grey zone."

The bet is that consistent and widespread labelling will help consumers make better choices, even if attributes like performance and price remain their primary concerns when selecting a product. That means a lot of work ahead to scale up the label's use and explain the scoring system to consumers.

EcoBeautyScore is working on 30 categories in total. It's planning on releasing scores across two more by the first half of 2026 and adding at least another couple by the end of next year. Other members of the organisation, which includes companies from Walgreens Boots Alliance and Colgate-Palmolive to Coty, Chanel and Shiseido, are expected to start labelling covered products in the coming months. The hope is non-members will start to use the platform to score their products too.

"In cosmetics, having L'Oréal and Beiersdorf with brands already going live, this is something that is relevant," said Pilzner. "You need to have big brands show conviction that this is the right thing to do... This would move the needle."

*Editor's Note: This article was amended on 15 July 2025 to correct the name of Beiersdorf's spokesperson.*

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