Over the last few decades, officials in environmental, health, and safety agencies at the federal and state levels have tried to promote public health protection through voluntary programs designed to encourage effective safety and environmental management by recognizing qualifying businesses as high-performing leaders. Multiple sources of evidence from two flagship voluntary programs—the Environmental Protection Agency’s National Environmental Performance Track and the Occupational Safety and Health Administration’s Voluntary Protection Programs—are used in this paper to address two main questions: (1) Do such programs promote exemplary environmental and safety leadership as they purport to do, or are they instead promoting more of a type of “public relations”? (2) Can these programs scale up to a level that would make them a potentially significant alternative form of governance? We conclude that neither of these programs in practice live up to their designs nor constitute viable alternative strategies to public regulation.

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