



environment

Environmental
LABELS



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With increasing consumer concern about the environmental impact of the goods and services they buy, environmental labelling has emerged as a key tool for making sustainable purchasing decisions.

The commercial benefits of environmental labelling for both buyers and suppliers has given rise to a multitude of environmental claims, labelling schemes and initiatives, each offering different measures and benchmarks. This has increased the awareness of the environmental impact of products and services, but not without some confusion in the market. The ISO range of standards for environmental labels and claims helps to make sense of it all, providing harmonized criteria, definitions and guidelines for the many labels, claims and declarations that are prevalent in today's marketplace.

Why do we need ISO standards for environmental labels?

Environmental labels provide information about a product or service in terms of its overall environmental benefits, such as the recyclability of its packaging, or the absence of noxious ingredients. At a time when more and more consumers are motivated to purchase environmentally benign products, this information can positively influence consumer choices, creating a win-win situation for all. However, the increasing proliferation of such labelling has led to concerns of 'greenwashing' and exaggerated marketing claims. What is needed, therefore, are internationally agreed and harmonized criteria and methods of labelling to provide a credible and level playing field. This is where ISO International Standards play a fundamental role.

Who develops ISO standards for environmental labels?

ISO standards are developed by groups of experts within technical committees (TCs). TCs are made up of representatives and international experts from industry, non-governmental organizations, governments and other stakeholders who are put forward by ISO and its members from all over the world. Each TC deals with a different subject or specialist area.

ISO/TC 207/SC 3, *Environmental labelling*, is a subcommittee of ISO/TC 207, *Environmental management*, and is the hub for the development of standards for environmental labelling. It consists of experts from 78 countries and has published six standards to date.



Who benefits from ISO standards for environmental labels?

Industry

ISO standards for environmental labels help businesses create their own environmental labelling that effectively and accurately describes their products in a way that instills loyalty and trust in their customers.

Consumers

Consumers benefit when businesses use ISO standards to provide clear and accurate information that can be easily compared with other products and services.

Regulators

Regulators can rely on ISO standards as a solid base on which to create public policy that meets international commitments, in addition to helping them establish and measure criteria for environmentally-related incentive schemes. ISO standards also help regulators address the many challenges that climate change brings.



What kinds of environmental labels do ISO standards cover ?

- **Type I environmental labelling**
 - ▶ *for eco-labelling schemes where there are clearly defined criteria for products*
- **Type II self-declared environmental claims**
 - ▶ *for products and services where there are neither criteria nor labelling schemes*
- **Type III environmental declarations**
 - ▶ *for specific aspects of products using a life-cycle approach*

What standards does ISO have for environmental labels?

The ISO 14020 series of standards provides businesses with an internationally recognized and agreed set of benchmarks against which they can prepare their own environmental labels, claims and declarations.

These include :

General principles

- ISO 14020, *Environmental labels and declarations – General principles*, establishes the guiding principles for the development and use of environmental labels and declarations.

It is aimed at businesses wanting to develop an environmental label or claim, as it describes the principles to ensure they provide accurate and credible information. It outlines the principles that underpin all the other standards in the 14020 series and can be used by those making environmental claims for which specific standards have not yet been developed.

Nordic Swan Ecolabel: The official ecolabel of the Nordic countries (www.nordic-ecolabel.org)



Eco labelling schemes

- ISO 14024, *Environmental labels and declarations – Type I environmental labelling – Principles and procedures*, outlines the requirements for developing “Type I environmental labelling programmes”, more commonly known as ecolabelling schemes. These schemes award a mark or logo to products or services upon fulfilling a set of criteria.

ISO 14024 features the principles and procedures for selecting product categories, product-environmental criteria, product-function characteristics and for assessing and demonstrating compliance. It also establishes the certification procedures for awarding the label.

Internationally recognized, ISO 14024 has been adopted as a benchmark for environmental labels by the Global Ecolabelling Network (GEN), the international federation of ecolabelling bodies.



Self-declared environmental claims

Where there is no eco-labelling scheme to verify environmental claims, it is essential to have a means of demonstrating the reliability of self-declared information. This will help to avoid confusion, barriers to trade and unfair competition. ISO 14021, *Environmental labels and declarations – Self-declared environmental claims (Type II environmental labelling)*, can provide credibility for environmental claims that manufacturers, marketers and resellers can make for products or services.

ISO 14021 identifies and clarifies a number of commonly used terms used in claims, whether they be on the product or elsewhere such as in product literature, advertising or reports. It also details the evaluation methods for each term in order to help ensure they are valid and scientifically sound.

In addition, ISO 14021 has a comprehensive list of general requirements for the use of other terms that are not already defined. It also describes other label-related information and guidance, such as the use, placement and size of symbols and graphics.





Life cycle data declarations

Declarations that show quantified environmental information on the life-cycle of a product enable comparisons between similar products. They also are useful when fulfilling regulatory requirements and in business-to-business communications. Commonly known as Environmental Product Data (EPD) sheets, they represent the “nutrition labels for the environment”. Such labels provide display information and data that consumers can use to assess and compare the environmental impacts of products and services.

- ISO 14025, *Environmental labels and declarations – Type III environmental declarations – Principles and procedures*, establishes the principles and procedures for developing the data for such declarations and the requirements for declaration programmes, including the requirement that data are independently verified.

Footprint Communication

- ISO 14026, *Environmental labels and declarations – Principles, requirements and guidelines for communication of footprint information*, provides guidance on how to communicate environmental footprint information in a transparent and robust way. It outlines internationally agreed terms and definitions for footprint declarations.

ISO 14026 describes the requirements for determining which environmental aspects are covered by the footprint data, ensuring that the information is transparent and clearly understood.

It also provides the requirements for establishing a communication programme for footprints.

Product category rules

Product category rules (PCRs) are necessary when implementing standards for product-related environmental claims. They enable comparability of data that is produced to support environmental claims and declarations. However, there are many in existence and their quality varies.

- ISO/TS 14027, *Environmental labels and declarations – Development of product category rules*, is an internationally agreed set of principles, requirements and guidelines for developing quality PCR that can be widely used and understood.

About ISO

ISO (International Organization for Standardization) is an independent, non-governmental international organization with a membership of 164* national standards bodies. Through its members, it brings together experts to share knowledge and develop voluntary, consensus-based, market-relevant International Standards that support innovation and provide solutions to global challenges.

ISO has published more than 22500* International Standards and related documents covering almost every industry, from technology to food safety, to agriculture and healthcare.

For more information, please visit www.iso.org

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