LIFE / FIT FOR REACH

Environmental statements and programmes for products

Consumers and purchasers are increasingly confronted with environmental claims, labels and certifications. Understanding the differences between ecolabels, environmental labels, self-declared claims and environmental product declarations helps to identify trustworthy information and avoid misleading claims.

This guide presents the most common ecolabels and environmental labels relevant to products used in Europe, explains what they certify, and highlights their approach to environmental performance and chemical safety.

There are three main ways of communicating the environmental aspects of a product: environmental labels and ecolabels verified by an independent third party, self-declared environmental claims made by manufacturers, and Environmental Product Declarations (EPDs), which provide quantified environmental information based on a product life cycle assessment.

The ISO 14020 series distinguishes three types of environmental labels and declarations: ecolabels, self-declared environmental claims and environmental product declarations (EPDs). Environmental labels are not covered by the ISO 14020 framework, but provide information on specific sustainability attributes of products.

Environmental statements/programmes		
ISO 14020:2022 Environmental statements and programmes for products – Principles and general requirements		
Ecolabels	**Self-declared environmental claims**	**Environmental product declarations (EPDs)**
ISO 14024:2026 Environmental statements and programmes for products – Ecolabels	*ISO 14021:2026 Environmental statements and programmes for products – Self-declared environmental claims*	*ISO 14025:2026 Environmental statements and programmes for products – Environmental product declarations (EPDs)*
Ecolabels identify products (goods or services) that are environmentally preferable within a product category, based on **life cycle considerations** and are awarded by an **impartial third party** to products that meet ambitious environmental criteria established by the label donor.	Developed by a manufacturer or service provider and are **not third-party certified** but expected to be verifiable and accurate.	Provide **quantified environmental data of a product**, under pre-set categories of parameters based on life cycle assessment and **verified by an independent third party**.

Environmental labels (not covered by the ISO 14020 framework) share some characteristics with ecolabels, including the use of defined criteria and, in many cases, independent verification, but focus on specific environmental or health-related attributes (e.g. energy consumption, agricultural practices, or indoor air quality) within a particular product sector.

1. Ecolabels

One of the best ways to inform consumers about the environmental benefits of a product is ecolabelling that includes verification by a third party. The right to use an ecolabel is granted by the owner of the corresponding ecolabel programme, once it has been proved that the product or service complies with the requirements of the labelling programme.

The core principles of ecolabelling schemes are:

1. Transparency – the criteria of the label are accessible to everyone and their development process is transparent thanks to the involvement of civil society organisations.

2. Science based – scientific methods are used to develop the criteria of the ecolabel and/or to document the conformity of the label holders with the ecolabel criteria.

3. Independence – conflicts of interest are prevented. Ecolabel owners are independent from the producer and independent auditors (or the ecolabel owner) check the product compliance with the requirements of the ecolabel.

4. Life cycle approach – the ecolabel criteria address the most important environmental impacts of a product during its life cycle. This prevents producers from simply picking and choosing the easiest aspects in order to obtain an ecolabel.

5. Improvement – criteria are continuously improved by the label owners and are more stringent than the legal requirements applicable to a particular product. The goal of ecolabels is to certify only those products that significantly exceed the average performance.

6. Voluntary – manufacturers and service providers choose whether to apply for the ecolabel. Participation is not mandatory.

Ecolabelling criteria are awarded to products that fulfil strict criteria, which in many cases are met by only about 10% of the products in the market. Companies checking whether their product complies with the ecolabelling criteria may identify further ways of optimising their products and production processes.

The best practice for ecolabelling is defined by ISO 14024:2026 Environmental statements and programmes for products – Ecolabels.

The internationally recognised network of eco labelling organisations – The Global Ecolabelling Network (GEN) – is a non-profit association of leading ecolabelling organisations worldwide. Only such ecolabelling schemes that correspond to ISO 14024 standard are granted full GEN membership, so their website is a reliable source for choosing and verifying labels.

Ecolabels	Organisation (Country)	Description
EU Ecolabel	**European Commission** (European Union)	The **EU Ecolabel** is the EU's official voluntary label for environmentally friendly products. Since 1992, it has certified goods with independently verified low environmental impact. To earn the label, products must meet strict criteria throughout their life cycle–from raw materials and production to distribution and disposal. The label also promotes durable, repairable and recyclable design. The criteria of most product categories exclude the criterion that a product contains substances on the REACH candidate list. Additional chemicals – related criteria are defined for different products groups.
Nordic Swan Ecolabel	**Nordic Ecolabelling** (Nordic Countries)	The **Nordic Swan Ecolabel** is the official Nordic Countries' ecolabel. The Nordic Swan helps to reduce the environmental impact of products and services, offering companies a practical tool for adopting sustainable solutions. Products with the Nordic Swan may not contain any substances on the REACH candidate list. Depending on the product group, other substances also may be excluded.
The Blue Angel Eco-Label	**German Federal Environment Agency** (Germany)	The **Blue Angel** has been the ecolabel of the German Federal Government for more than 40 years. The Blue Angel guarantees that a product places less burden on the environment and fulfils high standards with respect to the protection of human health – while also having the same fitness for use and quality as other products. Blue Angel sets stringent requirements on the use of chemicals throughout a product's life cycle. Depending on the product category, hazardous substances such as CMR substances, PFAS, certain plasticisers and other environmentally harmful chemicals are restricted or prohibited. The ecolabel also includes limits on emissions, hazardous residues, and substances with poor biodegradability or high aquatic toxicity.
TCO Certified	**TCO Development** (Global)	**TCO Certified** is the world-leading sustainability certification for IT products. It includes a comprehensive system of up-to-date criteria, independent verification and a structured system for continuous improvement to drive real and lasting change. TCO Certified addresses hazardous chemicals by restricting the most harmful substances, requiring independent assessment and approval of safer alternatives, protecting workers from exposure to toxic process chemicals, continuously expanding safer substance categories, and maintaining a transparent, publicly available Accepted Substance List.

2. Environmental labels by product group

Environmental labels (not covered by the ISO 14020 framework) share some characteristics with ecolabels, including the use of defined criteria and, in many cases, independent verification. However, rather than evaluating a broad range of environmental impacts across a product's life cycle, they focus on one or a limited number of specific environmental or health-related attributes within a particular product sector.

Environmental labels can help purchasers to identify products with preferable performance in relation to a specific environmental or health concern, but they should not be regarded as equivalent to ecolabels.

Construction products

Labels related to indoor air quality and the emission of hazardous substances from construction, finishing and interior materials.

Label	Organisation (Country)	Description
M1 Emission Classification 	**Rakennustieto** (Finland)	**M1** classified products meet the limits for emissions of volatile organic compounds (VOCs), formaldehyde, and ammonia from construction products defined by the M1 classification system. The product's odour also meets acceptability standards.
Eurofins' Indoor Air Comfort® 	**Eurofins Scientific** (Denmark)	**Eurofins' Indoor Air Comfort®** product certification shows compliance of a product with low VOC emissions criteria on two levels: Standard level **"Indoor Air Comfort®"** certified products comply with emission criteria of all legal specifications issued by authorities in the European Union and its Member States. Higher level **"Indoor Air Comfort® GOLD"** certified products additionally comply with many of the voluntary specifications of the relevant ecolabels, similar specifications in the EU and sustainable building certification requirements.
EMICODE® 	**GEV** – Association for the Control of Emissions in Products for Flooring Installation, Adhesives and Building Materials (Germany)	**The EMICODE®** label certifies low-emission flooring underlays and construction products. In the focus of the tests according to ISO 16000 is the VOC missions' behaviour which are, if meeting EMICODE criteria, classified in 3 categories by the GEV: • EMICODE EC1 PLUS – very low emission • EMICODE EC1 – very low emission • EMICODE EC2 – low emission.

3. Textile products

Textile labels related to textile production, including fibre origin, processing methods, chemicals used, and, in some cases, social aspects within the supply chain.

Label	Organisation (Country)	Description
Global Organic Textile Standard (GOTS)	**Global Standards GmbH** (Germany)	**GOTS** – global label for textiles made with organic fibres, combining environmental and social requirements with independent certification across the entire textile processing supply chain.
OEKO-TEX® MADE IN GREEN	**OEKO-TEX® International Association** (Switzerland)	**OEKOTEX MADE IN GREEN** certifies that a textile product has been tested for harmful substances and was manufactured in environmentally responsible facilities under socially responsible working conditions, with traceability through the supply chain.
OEKO-TEX® STANDARD 100		**OEKOTEX STANDARD 100** certifies that a textile product and all its components (e.g., fabric, thread, buttons, zippers) have been tested for harmful substances and are safe for human health.

4. Cosmetics

COSMOS and NATRUE are leading international certification schemes for natural and organic cosmetics. Both rely on independent third-party verification, restrict the use of synthetic ingredients, promote sustainable production, and help consumers to identify products that genuinely meet high environmental and natural-origin standards.

Label	Organisation (Country)	Description
COSMOS	**COSMOS-standard AISBL** (International)	**The COSMOS-standard AISBL** is an international certification scheme for natural and organic cosmetics, developed by leading European certification organisations: BDIH (Germany), Cosmebio and Ecocert (France), ICEA (Italy), and the Soil Association (UK). Restricts the use of synthetic and petrochemical ingredients and prohibits the use of genetically modified organisms (GMOs), animal testing, and most nanomaterials, while allowing only specified processing methods and carefully assessed ingredients that meet its environmental and health criteria.
NATRUE	**The International Natural and Organic Cosmetics Association** (Belgium)	**NATRUE** is considered one of the most stringent cosmetic certification systems and is particularly valued for its strict ingredient criteria and strong anti-greenwashing focus. Restricts the use of synthetic ingredients and allows only specified natural, nature-derived and limited nature-identical substances in certified cosmetics.

The project "Chemicals Risk Management and Assessment of Alternatives: Tools and best practices to support circularity, create more sustainable products and avoid regrettable substitution" (LIFE FitForREACH2, No. 101113947 — LIFE22-ENV-EE-LIFE FitforREACH-2) is co-financed with the contribution of the LIFE Programme of the European Union.

Co-funded by the European union

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