

# *The World of Environmental Performance Labels*

## *— Reference Sheet*

### **Purpose**

To provide an understanding of the different types of ecolabels that exist and to identify common ecolabels to consider when making purchases. Ecolabels can be considered as mandatory or desirable product/service specifications.

### **Audience**

This worksheet is intended to support purchasing staff who are responsible for developing product specifications for market solicitations as well as clerical staff who make low dollar value purchases.

### **What are Ecolabels?**

Ecolabels are labels, which identify proven environmental preference of a good or service within a product category. Contrary to self-styled green claims or symbols made by manufacturers and service providers, ecolabels are awarded by an impartial third-party for certain products or services that meet transparent environmental leadership criteria. They provide information to consumers about the relative environmental quality of a product.

Products must be certified to these environmental leadership criteria through the independent third party entity in order to be able to display the ecolabel.

- » **Criteria are usually designed to allow for only a certain portion** of the total market of a given product category to qualify (e.g. Germany's Blue Angel program targets approximately 15–25 percent of products in the marketplace).
- » **Usually awarded for a fixed time period** with an administrative cost or other expense involved in using the labels on products.
- » **Based on a single product attribute** (e.g. recycled content or energy efficiency) or a full life-cycle assessment (LCA) of a product's environmental impact.

### **Different Types of Environmental Performance Labels**

Ecolabels are only one type of environmental performance labels. There are many other environmental performance labels or declarations used around the world. The International Organization for Standardization (ISO) has identified three different types:

Table 1: Three Types of Environmental Performance Labels

Type	Details
Type i: Environmental labelling (i.e. ecolabels)	These labels are commonly known as ecolabels. They are voluntary, multiple-criteria-based, third party programs that award a license that authorizes the use of environmental labels on goods and services indicating overall environmental preferability within a particular good or service category based on life cycle considerations. The label is awarded to goods and services that are verified by an independent third party as complying with the criteria.
Type ii: Self-declaration claims	Informative environmental self-declaration claims made by companies and not verified by an independent third party.
Type iii: Environmental declarations (e.g. report cards/information labels).	Voluntary presentation of quantified environmental data of a product; under pre-set categories of parameters set by a qualified third party and are based on a full life-cycle assessment of the good or service by a qualified third party and present the environmental performance of a product to enable objective comparisons between products fulfilling the same function. They are administered by a company or industry association and have limited application in the consumer market.

## Background

Ecolabels were first developed when governments, businesses and citizens became increasingly concerned about environmental protection. When businesses recognized that these concerns could be turned into a market advantage, the first green claims, labels and declarations appeared (e.g. natural, eco-friendly, energy efficient). As consumers became bombarded by these unsubstantiated claims, confusion and mistrust grew. The term “greenwashing” for unproven or immaterial claims emerged. Without standards and verification by an independent third party, consumers could not be sure that the environmentally preferable claim for a certain product or service was true. Thus, public and private organizations were founded to provide credible and impartial ecolabelling.

## What Environmental Performance Labels Should You Look For?

Many environmental performance labels provide relevant information and are worth considering. However, you should first look for ecolabels, as, in most cases, they are widely available, easy to identify and certified by an independent third party. They take the workload off you to do your own verification of self-declared claims or do a more comprehensive comparative analysis of environmental product declarations to other products. The table below outlines several ecolabels that are commonly recognized in Canada and describes which product categories they are applicable to.

This is not an exhaustive list as many ecolabels are available in the marketplace. To discover what other ecolabels may be relevant to your purchases visit [www.ecolabelindex.com](http://www.ecolabelindex.com). The goals of this website are to gather all ecolabels in the world onto one common platform, provide standard data and analysis on the ecolabels, and help companies buy and sell ecolabeled products and services.

## WORKSHEET #1: ECOLABELS

Table 2: Example Type I Ecolabels by Product Category

Product Category	Look for the Logo	Details
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Paper products</li> <li>Wood products</li> </ul>		<p><a href="#">Forest Stewardship Council</a></p> <p>The Forest Stewardship Council (FSC) is an independent, not for profit, non-government organization that provides standard setting, trademark assurance and accreditation services for companies and organizations interested in responsible forestry products.</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Adhesives/sealants</li> <li>Air filters</li> <li>Ceiling systems</li> <li>Cleaning products/systems</li> <li>Doors</li> <li>Electronic equipment</li> <li>Floor/wall finishing</li> <li>Flooring</li> <li>Furniture</li> <li>Paints</li> <li>Insulation</li> <li>Textiles</li> <li>Surfacing materials</li> </ul>		<p><a href="#">GREENGUARD Indoor Air Quality Certified</a></p> <p>The GREENGUARD Environmental Institute (GEI) certifies low emitting interior products and building materials that meet current indoor air quality standards.</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Most major appliances</li> <li>Heating and cooling systems</li> </ul>		<p><a href="#">EnerGuide</a></p> <p>EnerGuide is a Natural Resources Canada initiative that helps consumers purchase the most energy-efficient equipment on the market. It shows how much energy appliances consume in a year of normal service and makes it easy to compare the energy efficiency of each model to others of the same size and class. EnerGuide rates the energy consumption of a spectrum of products, from the best performing to the worst; not just for the most energy efficient in a product category.</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Household appliances</li> <li>Electronics</li> </ul>		<p><a href="#">ENERGY STAR</a></p> <p>Household and office appliances and electronics that have earned the ENERGY STAR meet strict energy efficiency guidelines set by the US Environmental Protection Agency and US Department of Energy and are among the top most energy efficient products in their class.</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Electronics including desktops, laptops, workstations and computer monitors</li> </ul>		<p><a href="#">Electronic Product Environmental Assessment Tool (EPEAT)</a></p> <p>EPEAT is a global environmental rating system that helps purchasers identify and compare environmentally preferable computers and other electronics. EPEAT also provides a clear and consistent set of performance criteria for the design of products, and provides an opportunity for manufacturers to secure market recognition for efforts to reduce the environmental impact of its products.</p>

Product Category	Look for the Logo	Details
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Automotive products and services</li> <li>• Building and construction products</li> <li>• Cleaning and janitorial products</li> <li>• Consumer products</li> <li>• Container, packaging, bags, and sacks</li> <li>• Electricity products</li> <li>• Events</li> <li>• Fuels, lubricants and related products</li> <li>• Marine products</li> <li>• Office furniture, equipment and business products</li> <li>• Printing products and services</li> <li>• Pulp and paper products</li> </ul>		<p><u><a href="#">Ecologo Product Certification</a></u></p> <p>ECOLOGO certified products, services and packaging are certified for reduced environmental impact. ECOLOGO certifications are voluntary, multi-attribute, lifecycle based environmental certifications that indicate a product has undergone rigorous scientific testing, exhaustive auditing, or both, to prove its compliance with stringent, third-party, environmental performance standards.</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Electric chillers</li> <li>• Paints and coatings</li> <li>• Window and doors</li> <li>• Household cleaning products</li> <li>• Food preparation and food service packaging</li> <li>• Floor finishes and strippers</li> <li>• Hand soaps and hand cleaners</li> <li>• Institutional and industrial cleaners</li> <li>• Paper towels, napkins and tissue paper</li> <li>• Printing and writing paper</li> </ul>		<p><u><a href="#">Green Seal</a></u></p> <p>Green Seal is an independent, non-profit organization that strives to achieve a healthier and cleaner environment by identifying and promoting products and services that cause less toxic pollution and waste, conserve resources and habitats, and minimize global warming and ozone depletion.</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Food and agricultural products</li> </ul>		<p><u><a href="#">Canada Organic Regime</a></u></p> <p>The Canada Organic Regime is a Government of Canada regulated system for organic agricultural products. It gives assurance on the production of high quality food using sustainable management practices, which avoid damage to the environment, and ensure the ethical treatment of livestock.</p>

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<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Food and agricultural products</li></ul>		<p><a href="#">US Department of Agriculture (USDA)</a> <a href="#">Agricultural Marketing Service (AMS)</a> <a href="#">National Organic Program (NOP)</a></p> <p>The American Organic Certification Agency sets environmental standards for food and agricultural products and is widely recognized in Canada.</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Accommodation facilities (hotels, motels and resorts)</li></ul>		<p><a href="#">Green Key Eco-Rating Program</a></p> <p>A graduated rating system for accommodation facilities committed to improving their fiscal and environmental performance. Depending on the environmental performance of the rated facility, ratings range from 1 Green Key up to 5 Green Keys.</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Tropical food and agricultural products</li><li>• Soccer balls</li><li>• Flowers</li></ul>		<p><a href="#">Fairtrade Canada</a></p> <p>Fairtrade Canada is a national, nonprofit Fair Trade certification organization, and the only Canadian member of the Fairtrade International (FLO). It promotes Fairtrade certified products in Canada to improve the livelihood of developing world farmers and workers. The following fair trade products are currently certified by Fairtrade Canada and available throughout the country: coffee, tea, cocoa, sugar, fresh fruit, grains (rice and quinoa), spices and herbs, cotton, wine, flowers, nuts and oils (shea butter and olive oil), and sports balls.</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Bottled water</li><li>• Food equipment</li><li>• Home water treatment systems</li><li>• Home appliances</li><li>• Plumbing and faucets</li><li>• Pool and spa components</li></ul>		<p><a href="#">NSF International</a></p> <p>The NSF label can be found on millions of consumer, commercial, and industrial products. Products are evaluated and certified against a set of standards to help ensure health and safety for consumers and the environment.</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Cleaners &amp; floor care</li><li>• Laundry and dishwasher detergents</li><li>• Graffiti remover</li><li>• Vehicle cleaning products</li><li>• Drain maintenance</li><li>• Holding tank treatment</li><li>• Septic system treatment</li><li>• Inkjet printers</li><li>• Pavement treatment</li></ul>		<p><a href="#">DfE Formulator</a></p> <p>The Design for the Environment (DfE) Formulator was designed with the US Environmental Protection Agency to promote risk reduction through pollution prevention (also known as source reduction). EPA recognized the need to develop a cleaner, safer technologies program to work with industry to design products, processes, and technologies that are competitive but environmentally preferable.</p>

Product Category	Look for the Logo	Details
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Apparel fabric</li> <li>• Baby care</li> <li>• Body cleansers</li> <li>• Building exteriors</li> <li>• Carpet fibre</li> <li>• Cleaning products</li> <li>• Fabrics for office furniture</li> <li>• Food and beverage</li> <li>• Lighting</li> <li>• Office seating</li> <li>• Office workstations</li> <li>• Whiteboards</li> </ul>		<p><u><a href="#">Cradle to Cradle®</a></u></p> <p>The Cradle to Cradle Certified™ Products Standard is a multi-attribute, continuous improvement methodology that evaluates products across five categories of human and environmental health and design for future life cycles. It is administered by the Cradle to Cradle Products Innovation Institute<sup>SM</sup>. Product certification is awarded at five levels (Basic, Bronze, Silver, Gold, Platinum), with the expectation that an applicant will optimize each aspect of their product over time.</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Furniture systems and components</li> <li>• Hard surface flooring</li> <li>• Paint</li> <li>• Wall coverings</li> <li>• Casework</li> <li>• Insulation</li> </ul>		<p><u><a href="#">SCS Global Services Green Product Certification</a></u></p> <p>SCS Global Services is a for profit company providing third-party environmental, sustainability and food quality certification, auditing, testing and standards development. The Green Product Certification Program includes ecolabels on indoor air quality, material content and responsible sourcing. It offers three indoor air quality certification programs as part of its ongoing efforts to improve the environmental performance of building products: Indoor Advantage™, Indoor Advantage Gold™ and FloorScore®. The program applies to any product generally used within an enclosed indoor environment, specifically within a commercial office or classroom space.</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Building and construction</li> <li>• Building interiors</li> <li>• Neighbourhood development (in pilot)</li> </ul>		<p><u><a href="#">LEED: Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design</a></u></p> <p>The LEED (Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design) Green Building Rating System® is a voluntary, consensus-based national standard for developing high-performance, sustainable buildings. Members of the US Green Building Council representing all segments of the building industry developed LEED and continue to contribute to its evolution.</p>

## Resources

- Global Ecolabelling Network