
**Environmental labels and declarations —
General principles**

Étiquettes et déclarations environnementales — Principes généraux

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Foreword

ISO (the International Organization for Standardization) is a worldwide federation of national standards bodies (ISO member bodies). The work of preparing International Standards is normally carried out through ISO technical committees. Each member body interested in a subject for which a technical committee has been established has the right to be represented on that committee. International organizations, governmental and non-governmental, in liaison with ISO, also take part in the work. ISO collaborates closely with the International Electrotechnical Commission (IEC) on all matters of electrotechnical standardization.

International Standards are drafted in accordance with the rules given in the ISO/IEC Directives, Part 3.

Draft International Standards adopted by the technical committees are circulated to the member bodies for voting. Publication as an International Standard requires approval by at least 75 % of the member bodies casting a vote.

International Standard ISO 14020 was prepared by Technical Committee ISO/TC 207, *Environmental management*, Subcommittee SC 3, *Environmental labelling*.

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Printed in Switzerland

Introduction

Environmental labels and declarations are one of the tools of environmental management, which is the subject of the ISO 1400 series.

Environmental labels and declarations provide information about a product or service in terms of its overall environmental character, a specific environmental aspect, or any number of aspects. Purchasers and potential purchasers can use this information in choosing the products or services they desire based on environmental, as well as other, considerations. The provider of the product or service hopes the environmental label or declaration will be effective in influencing the purchasing decision in favour of its product or service. If the environmental label or declaration has this effect, the market share of the product or service can increase and other providers may respond by improving the environmental aspects of their products or services to enable them to use environmental labels or make environmental declarations, resulting in reduced environmental stress from that product or service category.

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Environmental labels and declarations — General principles

1 Scope

This International Standard establishes guiding principles for the development and use of environmental labels and declarations. It is intended that other applicable standards in the ISO 14020 series be used in conjunction with this International Standard.

Where other International Standards provide more specific requirements than ISO 14020, such specific requirements take precedence.

This International Standard is not intended for use as a specification for certification and registration purposes.

NOTE Other International Standards in the series are intended to be consistent with the principles set forth in this International Standard. Other standards currently in the ISO 14020 series are ISO 14021, ISO 14024 and ISO 14025 (see Bibliography).

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2 Terms and definitions

For the purposes of this International Standard, the following terms and definitions apply.

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2.1

environmental label

environmental declaration

claim which indicates the environmental aspects of a product or service

NOTE An environmental label or declaration may take the form of a statement, symbol or graphic on a product or package label, in product literature, in technical bulletins, in advertising or in publicity, amongst other things.

2.2

life cycle

consecutive and interlinked stages of a product system, from raw material acquisition or generation of natural resources to the final disposal

[ISO 14040:1997]

NOTE "Product" includes any goods or service.

2.3

environmental aspect

element of an organization's activities, products or services which can interact with the environment

3 Objective of environmental labels and declarations

The overall goal of environmental labels and declarations is, through communication of verifiable and accurate information, that is not misleading, on environmental aspects of products and services, to encourage the demand for and supply of those products and services that cause less stress on the environment, thereby stimulating the potential for market-driven continuous environmental improvement.

4 General principles

4.1 General

All of the principles set out in 4.2 to 4.10 are applicable to all environmental labels and declarations.

Where other International Standards in the ISO 14020 series provide more specific requirements than ISO 14020, such specific requirements shall be followed.

4.2 Principle 1

4.2.1 Statement

Environmental labels and declarations shall be accurate, verifiable, relevant and not misleading.

4.2.2 Specific considerations

The usefulness and effectiveness of environmental labels and declarations depend upon the extent to which they convey reliable and meaningful information about the environmental aspects of a product or service. Environmental labels and declarations shall provide accurate information about the environmental aspects of a product or service. The factual and technical basis for environmental labels and declarations shall be verifiable. Environmental labels and declarations shall provide information that is relevant; they shall address only nontrivial environmental aspects related to the actual circumstances of natural resource extraction, manufacture, distribution, use or disposal associated with the product or service. A periodic review of the basis for environmental labels and declarations should occur to account for innovation. Information should be gathered at a frequency consistent with the pace of innovation. Environmental labels and declarations shall be understandable and not likely to mislead the intended purchaser of the product or service.

4.3 Principle 2

4.3.1 Statement

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Procedures and requirements for environmental labels and declarations shall not be prepared, adopted, or applied with a view to, or with the effect of, creating unnecessary obstacles to international trade.

4.3.2 Specific considerations

For guidance on the above principle, the applicable provisions and interpretations of the World Trade Organization should be taken into account.

4.4 Principle 3

4.4.1 Statement

Environmental labels and declarations shall be based on scientific methodology that is sufficiently thorough and comprehensive to support the claim and that produces results that are accurate and reproducible.

4.4.2 Specific considerations

The information supporting environmental labels and declarations shall be gathered and assessed using methods that are recognized and widely accepted in scientific or professional disciplines or are otherwise scientifically defensible. The methods should follow recognized standards that have international acceptability (these may include international, regional or national standards) or be industry or trade methods which have been subjected to peer review, where such standards or methods exist. The methods used shall be appropriate to the claim and shall provide information that is relevant and necessary to support the claim as well as accurate and reproducible.

4.5 Principle 4

4.5.1 Statement

Information concerning the procedure, methodology, and any criteria used to support environmental labels and declarations shall be available and provided upon request to all interested parties.

4.5.2 Specific considerations

The information shall include underlying principles, assumptions and boundary conditions. This information should be sufficient and reasonably comprehensible to allow purchasers, potential purchasers and other interested parties to evaluate and compare environmental labels and declarations in terms of scientific principles, relevance and overall validity, and to assess whether an environmental label or declaration is consistent with the applicable standards within the ISO 14020 series. This information shall also clearly indicate whether the environmental label or declaration is a self-declared environmental claim or is based on independent validation.

The means of obtaining this information shall be made known to purchasers and potential purchasers wherever the product or service is marketed. This can be achieved by the various means discussed in 4.10. There may be limits to the availability of specific information due to confidential business information, intellectual property rights or similar legal restrictions.

4.6 Principle 5

4.6.1 Statement

The development of environmental labels and declarations shall take into consideration all relevant aspects of the life cycle of the product.

4.6.2 Specific considerations

The life cycle of a product or service ranges from activities associated with the production and delivery of raw materials or generation of natural resources to the final disposal. Consideration of the life cycle of a product or service allows a party developing an environmental label or declaration to take into account a range of factors that impact on the environment. It further allows that party to identify the potential for one impact to be increased in the process of decreasing another.

Consideration should be given to the life cycle of a product or service in order to help identify appropriate and relevant characteristics and criteria for environmental labels and declarations or to determine the significance of an environmental claim. The extent to which the life cycle is considered may vary depending on the type of environmental label or declaration, the nature of the claim and the product category.

This does not necessarily mean that a life cycle assessment should be undertaken.

4.7 Principle 6

4.7.1 Statement

Environmental labels and declarations shall not inhibit innovation which maintains or has the potential to improve environmental performance.

4.7.2 Specific considerations

Requirements shall be expressed in terms of performance rather than design or descriptive characteristics. This approach leaves maximum flexibility for technical or other innovation. Prescriptive design criteria or implicit preference for a technology should be avoided because of the possibility of restricting or discouraging improvements in products or services which do not affect conformance to applicable environmental criteria or which could lead to significant environmental improvement.

4.8 Principle 7

4.8.1 Statement

Any administrative requirements or information demands related to environmental labels and declarations shall be limited to those necessary to establish conformance with applicable criteria and standards of the labels and declarations.

4.8.2 Specific considerations

All organizations, regardless of size, should have equal opportunity to use environmental labels and declarations. Involvement should not be hindered by extraneous factors or requirements such as procedural complexity or unreasonable information or administrative demands.

4.9 Principle 8

4.9.1 Statement

The process of developing environmental labels and declarations should include an open, participatory consultation with interested parties. Reasonable efforts should be made to achieve a consensus throughout the process.

4.9.2 Specific considerations

The process for developing standards and criteria shall be open to all interested parties. The parties shall be invited to participate and encouraged to become involved through timely and adequate notification. Parties may choose to participate directly or through other means such as written or electronic correspondence. Comments and input shall be responded to in a meaningful way that addresses the substance of the comment or input. For self-declared environmental claims developed in accordance with ISO 14021, consultation is regarded as having occurred during the development of that International Standard.

NOTE For further guidance see ISO/IEC Guide 2 and ISO/IEC Guide 59.

4.10 Principle 9

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4.10.1 Statement

Information on the environmental aspects of products and services relevant to an environmental label or declaration shall be available to purchasers and potential purchasers from the party making the environmental label or declaration.

4.10.2 Specific considerations

Ultimately, the effectiveness of environmental labels and declarations depends on their ability to enable purchasers and potential purchasers to take responsibility for, and make informed choices about, the environmental aspects of their purchasing decisions and to influence purchasers and potential purchasers in their selection of products or services. This, in turn, is related to the degree of acceptance and understanding purchasers and potential purchasers have of the information provided about environmental aspects.

Therefore, parties using environmental labels and declarations have an incentive and a responsibility to provide their purchasers and potential purchasers with access to information so that the purchaser and potential purchaser may understand the meaning of any claim, symbol or term. This can be accomplished through various means, such as advertising, explanatory panels at the retail level, free telephone numbers, and education programmes, among others. The information provided shall be appropriate and sufficient to the nature and scope of the environmental claim being made.

Bibliography

- [1] ISO 14021, *Environmental labels and declarations — Self-declared environmental claims.*¹⁾
- [2] ISO 14024, *Environmental labels and declarations — Environmental labelling Type I — Guiding principles and procedures.*¹⁾
- [3] ISO 14025, *Environmental labels and declarations — Environmental labelling Type III — Guiding principles and procedures.*¹⁾
- [4] ISO 14040, *Environmental management — Life cycle assessment — Principles and framework.*
- [5] ISO/IEC Guide 2, *General terms and their definitions concerning standardization and related activities.*
- [6] ISO/IEC Guide 59, *Code of good practice for standardization.*

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