



## A Shopper's Guide to **Green Labels**

Understanding environmental  
labels on products

## Green Labels and Claims

**Green labels and claims can help consumers spot products which are less harmful to the environment.**

However, it's not always obvious what **green labels** mean. This guide from Defra explains the meaning of some of the logos and labels commonly found on products available in the UK, and gives website addresses for further information.

Each of the labels shown here has an environmental or sustainability strand. This could be protection of natural resources or habitats, or minimisation of energy consumption in manufacture or use. Some labels here focus mainly on agricultural or ethical aspects.

There isn't room to include every scheme, but the guide shows examples of the main types of schemes. We hope it will come in useful for all interested shoppers.

Apart from organised labelling schemes, manufacturers and retailers can make their own **green claims**. Some of these give useful information on how the product is made, or the best way to use or dispose of it.

But sometimes claims are vague or don't give a proper explanation. For example, phrases like "environmentally friendly" and "kind to nature" are meaningless.

Symbols of globes, trees and flowers also mean nothing unless they come with a clear explanation of what is being done to help the environment.

The Government has published the **Green Claims Code** and other guidance to improve the standard of environmental claims. The Code gives guidance on best practice in making green claims, and is based on more detailed guidance in International Standard ISO 14021. To see the Code online, and see other Defra guidance about green claims, visit <http://www.defra.gov.uk/environment/consumerprod/publications/index.htm>.

### Copies of the Code from:

Defra publications, Admail 6000, London SW1A 2XX

T: 08459 556000 E: [defra@iforcegroup.com](mailto:defra@iforcegroup.com)

**Extra copies of this guide are available** from the same address – quote PB11502. December 2005

**And lastly** many products can be recycled after use. To find out how, and what a difference recycling makes, visit [www.recyclenow.com](http://www.recyclenow.com), and look for its logo to find out where to recycle:



## Food Labels

**These are examples of food labels that focus on environmental aspects of food production.**

The **LEAF Marque** is about Linking Environment and Farming. It is one of the approaches to farm management that gives you the choice to buy affordable food produced by farmers who are committed to improving the environment for the benefit of wildlife and the countryside.

The **Marine Stewardship Council (MSC)** has set an internationally recognised environmental standard for sustainable and well-managed fisheries. It is based on healthy fish stocks, a thriving marine environment and effective management. The MSC logo appears on seafood in supermarkets and restaurants.

**For more about food labels**, visit the Food Standards Agency's special website: [www.eatwell.gov.uk/foodlabels/](http://www.eatwell.gov.uk/foodlabels/)



[www.leafmarque.com](http://www.leafmarque.com)



[www.msc.org](http://www.msc.org)

## Organic Labels

**The word "organic" is defined by law. One characteristic of organic farming is that it strictly limits use of artificial chemical fertilisers and pesticides.**

The word "organic" can be used on food products only if they are produced according to regulations, and farmers and processors must be certified by an approved organisation.

The full list of authorised certification bodies is at: [www.defra.gov.uk/farm/organic/certbodies/approved.htm](http://www.defra.gov.uk/farm/organic/certbodies/approved.htm).

Organic standards don't just apply to food. Additional private standards used by authorised bodies increasingly cover other products, including textiles, cosmetics, wood products and composts.

There is no requirement to display a logo, but the certification number must be used in the labelling of certified organic products (eg "Organic Certification: UK 1"). Two examples of organic logos are shown below.



[www.soilassociation.org](http://www.soilassociation.org)



[www.organicfarmers.org.uk](http://www.organicfarmers.org.uk)

## Timber Products

**A number of schemes cover timber products. These are two examples.**

The Trademark of the **Forest Stewardship Council** indicates that the wood used to make a product comes from a forest which is well managed according to strict environmental, social and economic standards.

The forest of origin has been independently inspected and evaluated according to the principles and criteria for forest management agreed and approved by the FSC.

The **PEFC Council** (Programme for the Endorsement of Forest Certification schemes) is an independent organisation whose logo provides an assurance that its certified wood and paper products have been independently audited as coming from sustainably managed forests.



[www.fsc-uk.org](http://www.fsc-uk.org)  
FSC-GBR-669

FSC trademark © Forest Stewardship Council A.C.



PEFC/16-44/01  
[www.pefc.org](http://www.pefc.org)

## The Wider World

**These are examples of schemes which focus on providing sustainable livelihoods and protecting ecosystems and biodiversity in places where products originate.**

The Fairtrade Foundation awards the **FAIRTRADE Mark** to products that meet international Fairtrade standards. These include long-term trading contracts and a price that covers the cost of sustainable production and living. Farmers and workers' organisations receive a premium to invest in social and environmental projects benefiting their communities.

The Mark appears on a wide range of certified products, including coffee, tea, fruit, cotton and footballs, and composite products like biscuits which include a minimum percentage of Fairtrade ingredients.

The **Rainforest Alliance** works with foresters, farmers and tour operators to ensure that their goods and services are environmentally and socially responsible. Its certified seal of approval appears on products including timber, paper, bananas and coffee which have been grown or made sustainably.



[www.fairtrade.org.uk](http://www.fairtrade.org.uk)



[www.rainforest-alliance.org](http://www.rainforest-alliance.org)

## Ecolabels

Ecolabels usually cover a wide range of environmental impacts, across the lifetime of a product, from production and use through to disposal.

Some, like the European Ecolabel, shown below, apply to many different types of products.

### European Ecolabel

This is an official Europe-wide award for non-food products that minimise impacts on the environment.

Products must be independently certified, and have to meet strict criteria for all the main environmental impacts across their whole life cycle.

Defra runs the scheme in the UK, where products with the Flower include kitchen rolls, toilet tissue, paints and clothing.

[www.defra.gov.uk/environment/consumerprod/ecolabel](http://www.defra.gov.uk/environment/consumerprod/ecolabel)

<http://europa.eu.int/ecolabel>



Some countries or areas also have national schemes, like the **Nordic Swan** in Scandinavia and the **Blue Angel** in Germany, shown below.

For more about ecolabels, visit the website of the Global Ecolabelling Network - [www.gen.gr.jp](http://www.gen.gr.jp)



[www.ecolabel.nu](http://www.ecolabel.nu)



[www.blauer-engel.de](http://www.blauer-engel.de)

## Energy Labels

The energy labels shown here focus on products which make the best use of energy, and so perform well while saving on running costs and helping the environment.

### European Energy Label

All European manufacturers and retailers must tell you about the energy efficiency of household electrical fridges, freezers, washing machines, tumble dryers, washer-dryers, dishwashers, air conditioners, ovens and light bulbs.

Products are generally rated from 'A' to 'G', with 'A' being the most efficient ('A+' and 'A++' for the most efficient fridges and freezers).

[www.defra.gov.uk/environment/consumerprod/mtp](http://www.defra.gov.uk/environment/consumerprod/mtp)

| Energy  |                             | Washing machine |
|---|-----------------------------|-----------------|
| Manufacturer Model  |                             |                 |
| <b>More efficient</b>   |                             | <b>A</b>        |
| A   |                             |                 |
| B   |                             |                 |
| C   |                             |                 |
| D   |                             |                 |
| E   |                             |                 |
| F   |                             |                 |
| <b>Less efficient</b>   |                             |                 |
| G   |                             |                 |
| Energy consumption kWh/cycle (based on standard test results for 60°C cotton cycle) | 0.95                        |                 |
| Actual energy consumption will depend on how the appliance is used                  |                             |                 |
| Washing performance A: higher G: lower  |                             | A B C D E F G   |
| Spin drying performance A: higher G: lower  |                             | A B C D E F G   |
| Spin speed (rpm)  | 1400                        |                 |
| Capacity (cotton) kg  | 5.0                         |                 |
| Water consumption /   | 55                          |                 |
| Noise (dB(A) re 1 pW)   | Washing 5.2<br>Spinning 7.0 |                 |
| Further information is continued in product brochures                               |                             |                 |

## Energy Saving Recommended

The Energy Saving Recommended logo endorses products that are amongst the most energy efficient available. The scheme is managed by the Energy Saving Trust.

The wide range of products covered includes appliances like washing machines and refrigeration, light fittings, gas and oil boilers, insulation, hot water cylinders and glazing.

Search the online product database at [www.est.org.uk/recommended](http://www.est.org.uk/recommended)



### Energy Star

The Energy Star logo means that the energy consumption of an appliance is below an agreed level in 'stand-by' mode.

The logo appears on some types of office equipment, such as computers, monitors, printers and fax machines.

Within the EU, the Energy Star is a voluntary labelling scheme and its use is controlled by an agreement between the USA and European Community.

[www.energystar.gov](http://www.energystar.gov)



## Vehicle Labelling

The **UK Fuel Economy Label** for all new cars aims to encourage reduced energy consumption and carbon emissions in the transport sector. It is similar to the European Energy label, also shown here, in order to enhance understanding about the links between energy use and climate change.

The label shows how much carbon dioxide a car emits. Carbon dioxide is the main greenhouse gas responsible for climate change. The label also gives estimated fuel costs for 12,000 miles and the vehicle excise duty for 12 months so you can see how much these will cost before you buy. Lower carbon dioxide emissions mean lower road tax and lower running costs.

It has been introduced voluntarily by the car industry under the auspices of the Low Carbon Vehicle Partnership which was set up with Government funding. Members include car companies and environmental groups.

[www.lowcvp.org.uk](http://www.lowcvp.org.uk)

| Fuel Economy  |                   | Supermini Special           |
|---|-------------------|-----------------------------|
| CO <sub>2</sub> emission figure (g/km)  |                   |                             |
| <100 A  |                   |                             |
| 101-120 B   |                   | <b>B</b> 117 g/km           |
| 121-130 C   |                   |                             |
| 131-140 D   |                   |                             |
| 141-150 E   |                   |                             |
| 151-160 F   |                   |                             |
| 161+ G  |                   |                             |
| Fuel cost (estimated) for 12,000 miles  |                   |                             |
| VED for 12 months   |                   | £662                        |
| Environmental Information   |                   | £85                         |
| Make/Model  | Supermini Special | Engine Capacity (cc) 1399   |
| Fuel type   | Diesel            | Transmission 5 speed manual |
| Drive cycle   | Urban 5.4         | High 12.3                   |
| Extr-urban  | 3.8               | 74.3                        |
| Combined  | 4.4               | 54.2                        |
| Carbon dioxide emissions (g/km)   | 117 g/km          |                             |
| Important note: Actual specifications of this model may have lower CO <sub>2</sub> emissions than this. Check with your dealer. |                   |                             |

## Product-Specific Labels

These labels apply to specific types of products.

### Paint: VOC Labels

These labels indicate the relative content of VOCs (Volatile Organic Compounds) in paints and associated products. VOCs cause air pollution and may be harmful to human health.

The industry and retailers have agreed wording and standards for the use of this voluntary label. More information is available from the British Coatings Federation. There is no standard logo, but many retailers have adopted the form of logo shown here, which was developed by B&Q.

[www.coatings.org.uk](http://www.coatings.org.uk)

[www.diy.com/aboutbandq/sustainability/documents/paintleaflet\\_doc\\_reports.pdf](http://www.diy.com/aboutbandq/sustainability/documents/paintleaflet_doc_reports.pdf)



### Textiles: Oeko-Tex Standard 100

The **Oeko-Tex Standard 100** is an international certification system for textiles and garments covering all stages of production. Labelled products are tested by independent institutes for an extensive range of harmful substances based on the latest scientific findings and legal regulations. All parts of labelled articles must meet the defined requirements.

[www.oeko-tex.com](http://www.oeko-tex.com)



## Other Symbols

These often seen symbols have a more specific meaning.

The **Mobius Loop** simply means that a product or part of it can be recycled where facilities are available. The inclusion of a figure shows the percentage of recycled material that has been used to make the product.



[www.biffa.co.uk/getrecycling/symbols.php](http://www.biffa.co.uk/getrecycling/symbols.php)

The **Green Dot** is a registered trademark. It means that a financial contribution has been paid to an authorised packaging recovery scheme. (The UK is not a participating Green Dot system country.)

[www.green-dot.com](http://www.green-dot.com)

