

## Ecolabel and Transparency

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The goal of the different national and supranational ecolabelling programmes is to encourage consumers to favor products which are the least damaging to the environment. It is clear that the involvement of product and service users is essential to the establishment of a more sustainable social system. For this reason, ecolabelling must necessarily limit any risks of confusion<sup>1</sup>. To this end, labels must show all the impacts of a product's life cycle and use an objective, reliable, verifiable, and comprehensible evaluation method<sup>2</sup>.

In general, the organizations in charge of ecolabelling programmes claim that the multicriteria approach is used to define the exact labelling criteria appropriate for the product categories in question. These organizations generally maintain that their approach is based on the completion of exhaustive and complete life cycle analyses which take into account all of the impacts caused by a product throughout its life cycle. And yet, the real situation is often far less clearcut, and these simplified approaches, which tend to reconcile economic realism and methodological coherence<sup>3,4</sup>, constitute the usual procedure for criteria definition.

Thus, the procedures involved in criteria development often rely on a «semi qualitative»<sup>3</sup> approach to the life cycle which uses both qualitative and quantitative data in order to identify the product's significant stages on the environment<sup>5</sup>.

Presently, the ecolabel is «non-verifiable expert property» for the consumer. The ecolabel's lack of objectivity in its criteria and its lack of transparency, resulting from simplified and non standardized methods whose accuracy cannot be measured, can only damage this sustainable development tool's credibility. In effect, the primary hindrance to ecolabel development lies precisely within this difficulty of finding a compromise between economic feasibility and the scientific and methodological rigor that are indispensable to the label's credibility and veracity<sup>6</sup>.

Is it possible to seek to reduce LCA costs and length without, at the same time, compromising LCA precision and transparency?

<sup>1</sup> CAVANAGH, K.C., « It's a Lorax Kind of Market! But is it a sneetches Kind of solution? : a critical review of current laissez-faire environmental marketing regulation », *Villanova Environmental Law Journal*, vol IX, Issue 1, 132; D. FUDENBERG, J. TIROLE, *Game theory*, MIT Press, Cambridge, MA, 1991

<sup>2</sup> SETAC, *Public Policy Applications of Life-Cycle Assessment*, Pensacola, SETAC Press, 1997  
*Règlement (CE) no 1980/2000* du Parlement européen et du Conseil

<sup>3</sup> BOEGLIN, N., « Analyse du cycle de vie : la promotion de la qualité écologique des produits et les écolabels », *Traité de génie industriel, Techniques de l'ingénieur*, Bruxelles, p. G6250-4, 7-1998

<sup>4</sup> DE RICHEMONT A., « Analyse du cycle de vie, applications dans les écolabels », *Traité de génie industriel, Techniques de l'ingénieur*, Bruxelles, G5 850, 7- 1998

<sup>5</sup> OCDE, *Étiquetage écologique: effets réels de certains programmes* (OCDE/GD(97)105), 1997. Site de l'OCDE

<sup>6</sup> COMMISSION DE COOPÉRATION ENVIRONNEMENTALE, *Pour des marchés verts : étiquetage, certification et acquisition écologique au Canada, au Mexique et aux Etats-Unis*, Montréal, CCE, 1999