

A Good Environmental Choice



Credible product information for sustainable development...

Good Environmental Choice Australia (GECA) is a national, third-party, independently verified Ecolabel that can be applied to a wide range of products and services. It provides a reliable and convenient way for purchasers to make environmentally preferable choices. While in the past people might have selected a product because it's cheap, looks good, has a brand they like, or lasts longer than a similar product, studies are showing that most customers today are increasingly willing to consider 'environmental impact' in their purchasing decisions.

GECA, a not-for-profit organisation, exists to reduce environmental harm by promoting the production and consumption of environmentally preferable products and services. The *Environmental Choice Australia* Ecolabel (see logo above), launched in November 2001, provides to the community and commercial markets an environmental mark of recognition for a wide range of products and services.

The Ecolabel is awarded to products that meet clear voluntary environmental performance standards. It offers independent assurance to customers that products and services deliver better environmental outcomes.

Our standards are developed in accordance with ISO 14024 (see box) and are based on international best practice. They establish minimum environmental performance criteria for a product or service across different parts of a product's life cycle (for example sourcing, manufacture, use and disposal). More than 200 manufacturers are now

Not-for-profit vs for-profit organisations:

As GECA is a not-for-profit organisation, all money we make goes back into improving our programs and standards. We also have no controlling interests, so we are wholly independent and transparent. For-profit organisations (as registered companies), don't have to reveal things which are commercial-in-confidence, meaning they may be influenced by interested parties. Many of the other ecolabels operating in Australia are for-profit.

licensed to display the GECA Ecolabel on more than 2,200 products that have been assessed as conforming to one of GECA's 42 Standards.

International recognition

GECA's Ecolabel program is internationally recognised through GECA's membership of the Global Ecolabelling Network (GEN). GEN is a global not-for-profit association of national third-party, environmental performance labelling organisations. It was founded in 1994 to improve, promote and develop the ecolabelling of products and services. GEN members must meet certain requirements, which include conforming to the principles of ISO 14024. ***GECA is the only Australian ecolabel recognised by GEN.***

Through our membership of GEN, we are able to assist Australian manufacturers and other suppliers in achieving international certification in GEN member countries – to use their ecolabels and access their markets as environmentally preferable products.

What is ISO 14024?

International Standards Organization (ISO) Standards are guidelines set to encourage best practice. ISO 14024:1999 is an International Standard for environmental labels and declarations (Type I environmental labelling), and details the principles and procedures of how an ecolabel should operate. Organisations use this standard as a guideline – no organisation can be independently certified to ISO 14024:1999.

A key condition of GEN membership is that the ecolabelling organisation must affirm that it “conforms to the GEN conditions of membership set forth in the GEN By-Laws”. GECA shows compliance with ISO 14024 through its Standards and through its membership of

Features and benefits of GECA

Ecolabelling in Australia is largely characterised by a range of labels created by industry groups and companies; these labels can potentially mislead the consumer or suggest environmental performance is greater than it really is. In some instances manufacturers

can place their own ecolabel on a product without changing the design and life cycle effects of that product or service. It is recognised in Australia that this type of behaviour can potentially misrepresent environmental performance to the public. The goal of GECA is to be an **independent** environmental certifier of products so that customers can be sure that when they see the GECA Ecolabel they are buying an environmentally preferable product.

The Environmental Choice Australia Ecolabel

GECA's Ecolabel provides many benefits to companies with certified products:

- **Recognition:** *The Environmental Choice Australia* Ecolabel is widely recognised by NGOs, government agencies, and procurement and building industry professionals in Australia.
- **Credibility:** GECA-certified products are independently assessed against scientifically based best practice environmental performance standards.
- **Trust:** GECA certification is rigorous and independent, and adheres to transparent, internationally recognised standards.
- **Differentiation:** The Environmental Choice Australia ecolabel identifies certified products as environmentally preferable, and makes it easy for customers to choose products on environmental grounds.
- **Risk mitigation:** Our Ecolabel provides third-party assurance of environmental performance, sends a clear environmental message, and helps ecologically sound manufacturers avoid 'greenwash' by competitors.
- **Reduced environmental impact:** GECA's Standards all seek to reward best practice on environmental performance – including reducing water consumption, reducing toxicity, minimising material usage and promoting the uptake of more sustainable materials. GECA-certified products make it easier for customers to reduce the environmental impacts of their consumption.

How the Ecolabel works

The *Environmental Choice Australia* program defines standards of environmental performance for different product and service groups. Independent verification by

PO Box 4140, Weston ACT 2611 Australia p:02 6287 3100 e:management@geca.org.au abn:27 118 766 153 w:www.geca.org.au

qualified auditors (known as Conformance Assessment Bodies) is undertaken to verify compliance with the criteria in our Standards.

If an organisation demonstrates that its product is in conformance with a GECA standard, GECA will issue the organisation with a licence to use the Environmental Choice Australia ecolabel for that product. The organisation is then entitled to display the GECA Ecolabel on that product, and in marketing material, and to claim the product is 'GECA certified'.

Our Standards are developed using a transparent and public process that incorporates the application of detailed environmental performance criteria. GECA has established standard development guidelines for developing standards in a consistent, independent, consultative and uniform way.

GECA and Green Star

Historically the Green Building Council of Australia (GBCA) has recognised GECA's Ecolabel as the only third-party independent ecolabel to achieve 100% Green Star points – and we are still the most stringent, robust, trusted and transparent label in the market. Although the GBCA has now opened up to include a number of other product certification schemes, confidence in GECA has been recently confirmed by the GBCA through its own recognition process, awarding an A level rating (the highest level) to GECA Standards in four categories – Furniture and Fittings, Panel Boards, Floor Coverings and Carpets. GECA has been assessed as complying with the requirements of the GBCA's Assessment Framework for Product Certification Schemes, confirming that GECA's Ecolabel is still highly regarded and valuable.

Find out more

For further information on GECA's Ecolabel and Standards, contact GECA on 02 6287 3100 or management@geca.org.au.