

Demystifying Ecolabels: Responsible, Sustainable Purchasing

“Going green” and “eco-friendly” have become the buzz word nowadays. The term “eco-friendly” is used for so many different products and practices, it can implement the practices that will lead to healthier living for the earth and its inhabitants. Eco-friendly products, also prevent contributions to air, water and land pollution. Engage in eco-friendly habits or practices make conscious of how to use resources.

Companies are labeling their products “eco-friendly” or “environmentally friendly” which are not truly being so. Marketing campaigns aimed at helping companies increase their product sales by appealing to environmentally conscious customers.

To avoid purchasing such products, look for products approved by the certification agencies accredited by the government, Energy Star programme or an ecologically conscious advocacy group.

Before buying, look for the label

In order to distinguish eco-friendly products from its counterpart, companies put special **Labels** on them. An eco-label is a label or logo to certify that a product meets high environmental and performance standards and has less impact on the environment than non-labeled products. Beyond this environmental aspect, it also shows that a company is socially responsible. These labels are carriers of essential product information to the consumer. Understand the label and choose wisely.....

BEE Star Label

An energy rating label on home appliances helps in buying decision. A five-star energy rated appliance is an efficient option compared to a lower rated one. If the stars are to be believed, they better be understood as well.

These labels provide information about an appliance’s energy consumption. BEE (Bureau of energy efficiency), an initiative of the Ministry of Power, Government of India, regularises these labels. It is the government’s way to standardise energy consumption levels and help consumers make an informed decision. More the stars, more energy efficient the appliance. This is a visual representation of the appliance’s efficiency.



Best Aquaculture Practices

The Best Aquaculture Practices standards, developed by the Global Aquaculture Alliance demonstrate commitment to providing safe and sustainably sourced seafood. This symbol on retail packaging tells consumers that their seafood was produced and taken to market with the utmost care for food safety, environmental integrity, social responsibility, animal welfare and traceability.



Better Cotton Initiative (BCI)

The label indicates that the cotton is cultivated through better organisation practices with less environmental impact. The Better Cotton Standard System is a holistic approach to sustainable cotton production, which covers all three pillars of sustainability: environmental, social and economic. BCI is a member of ISEAL Alliance, the global membership association for sustainability standards



Better Environmental Sustainability Targets (BEST) Standard 1001

It is a comprehensive set of voluntary environmental certification criteria for Lead battery manufacturing facilities including provisions for environmental Lead emissions, occupational Lead emissions, waste disposal, energy and water consumption, emergency response, chemical storage and handling. It has also a provision of taking back of used batteries for environmentally sound recycling.



Bonsucro

Bonsucro certification is a measure of sustainable sugar cane production and its derivatives. The certification is the first global metric standard for sugarcane relying on specific indicators to measure the environmental and social impact of the sugar cane production, its processing, and milling.



Blue Flag

The Blue Flag (Irish: Brat Ghorm) is a certification by the Foundation for Environmental Education (FEE) that a beach, marina or sustainable boating tourism operator meets its stringent standard. Environmental, educational, safety-related and access-related criteria must be met and maintained



Carbon footprint

The total amount of greenhouse gases produced to directly and indirectly support human activities, usually expressed in equivalent tons of carbon dioxide (CO₂). The symbol represents the minimum carbon emission from the product and assess the greenhouse gas emissions produced by the organisation, supply chain, and across the full product life cycle. Certified product footprint differentiates the product and brand, widen product's distribution and increase sales.



ECOTEL

The environmental certification is given to eco-sensitive hotels that are committed to the environment, water, solid waste and energy resources, and work towards community participation.



Energy Star

US Environmental Protection Agency (EPA)'s Energy Star Programme helps to identify the best ways to save energy. This symbol for energy efficiency provides simple, credible, and unbiased information that consumers and businesses rely on to make well-informed decisions. Saving energy reduces electricity demand and pollution.



EPEAT

It is an environmental product rating for electronic items that makes it easy to select high-performance electronics that support organisations' IT and sustainability goals. It addresses the full product lifecycle, from design and production to energy use and recycling. It includes product ratings for PCs and Displays (including tablets), Imaging Equipment (which includes printers, copiers, scanners and multifunction devices) and Televisions.



Fair Trade

The mission of Fairtrade is to connect consumers and producers through the Fairtrade Mark which signifies fairer trade conditions, thus providing more capacity for disadvantaged producers to combat poverty, strengthen their position and take more control over their future. It also protects the environment in which they live and work.



Forest Stewardship Council (FSC)

The Forest Stewardship Council mission is to promote environmentally sound, socially beneficial and economically prosperous management of the world's forests. FSC certification guarantees consumers that the FSC-labelled product they buy has come from a forest and supply chain that is managed responsibly. This is the mark of responsible forestry.



GEO Certified

It is an eco label for golf development and clubs that are sustainable and are continuously involved in environmental quality, people and communities. GEO Certification is managed by the Golf Environment Organisation, a non profit organisation working towards sustainability in the sport of golf.



Glass

Glass is commonly thought of as a product that can always be recycled. But there are a few glass items should not put in the recycle bin. Microwave turntables, ovenware, crystal glass, mirrors and light bulbs cannot be recycled. This symbol indicates to recycle glass in the bottle banks.



Global Organic Textile Standards (GOTS)

It integrates all of the textile processing stages, from the fibre to the finished product: the raw fibre must be organic farming certified and all the manufacturing processes involved must be inspected. The aim is to guarantee the traceability, the use of chemical friendly with the environment and the consumer's health, to ensure a quality system, a reduction of energy and to respect some social criteria.



GoodWeave

This label is meant to put off the use of child labour in the carpet industry. The GoodWeave International, a non profit organisation issues the label if the rug manufacturers adhere to the GoodWeave standards, do not use child labour and voluntarily join as licensees. It works towards creating education and other opportunities for children of workers. It was formerly known as Rugmark.



Green Dot

The Green Dot is most widely used recycling symbols on packaging. Its usage means that the producer of the packaging has contributed to the end recovery of packaging. It is not in itself a recycling symbol nor does it mean that the packaging material on which it is marked is either recycled, or made using recyclable content. It is more a mark of the producer's environmental responsibility and contribution to recycling.



Greenguard

It is an Indoor Air Quality Certification Programme certifies products designed for use in office environments and other indoor spaces meet strict chemical emissions limits, which contribute to the creation of healthier interiors.



Green Globe Certification

Travel and Tourism industries that indulge in responsible and sustainable tourism are given this certificate. The assessment criteria are comprised of social, ecological and economic aspects related to the sustainability principle. It was initially limited to the certification of companies in the travel and tourism industry. Now the certification procedure is extended to event venues and congress centres.



Hallmark

It is an assurance of purity of gold. It keeps control of quality and safeguards consumers from corrupt jewelers. The Hallmarking agency under Bureau of Indian Standards (BIS) Act, certifies gold on the basis of Indian standards. Certified metal conforms to the national and international standard of fineness and purity.



India Organic

It is a certification mark for organically farmed food products manufactured in India. The certification mark certifies that an organic food product conforms to the National Standards for Organic Products established in 2000.



The Food Safety and Standards Authority of India has also launched an “Indian Organic Integrity Data Base”, to help consumers verify the authenticity of organic food. It has also introduced a common logo for “organic foods” with the tagline ‘**Jaivik Bharat**’. The Indian Organic Integrity Database Portal has been jointly developed by FSSAI along with APEDA and PGS-India. FSSAI is mandated to regulate organic foods and will be mandatory to put the logo on the organic food.



Leaping Bunny

The Leaping Bunny is the only internationally-recognised certification for cosmetics, personal care and household product brands which are not tested on animals. The label signifies no animal testing at any stage of product development. The Logo can be seen on packaging, advertising, and websites for cosmetics and household products around the world.



LEED (Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design)

LEED is a U.S. Green Building Council programme that promotes sustainable site development, water savings, energy efficiency, sustainable materials selection, and indoor environmental quality. It is based on a system that awards silver, gold, and platinum certification levels based on the amount of points that a project is able to garner by employing green building strategies. India has also adopted LEED project as 'LEED India' registered with the Indian Green Building Council (IGBC) with a vision "To enable a sustainable built environment for all and facilitate India to be one of the global leaders in the sustainable built environment by 2025".



Mobius Loop

It is the symbol of recycled/recyclable products. It is the international recycling symbol. When accompanied by a percentage, it indicates that the product is made from recycled materials. When there is no percentage, it simply means that the product is recyclable.



Recycled Product: Product containing raw materials stemming from materials recovered from the sorting and collection of household or industrial waste.

Recyclable Product: Product which can potentially be disposed of in the household waste recycling bins for its recycling as a raw material in a second life cycle.

NATRUE Label

The International Natural and Organic Association issue this label for cosmetic products which use natural organic ingredients and indulge in environmentally friendly practices.



Plastics

There are different symbols and numbers on various plastic bottles and containers. Seven different numbers are found within triangles in plastic bottles and containers. All of these symbols offer some information about the harmful chemicals used in producing the plastics, the safety of the plastic, how biodegradable the plastic is, and how likely the plastic is to result in leaching. Here are is a brief description of each of those recycling symbols:

The “1” inside a triangle in a plastic bottle indicates PETE or PET which is Polyethylene Terephthalate. It is easy to recycle, lightweight and inexpensive, PET is used to produce single-use beverage bottles.

The “2” inside a triangle on the plastic container signals High-Density Polyethylene or HEPE which is one of the three plastic types considered safe due to lower risk of leaking. This sign is used in milk jugs, shampoo bottles, cereal box liners, butter and yogurt tubs, motor oil bottles, shopping and trash bags, and household and detergent cleaner bottles.

The “3” inside a triangle on plastic containers signals V or PVC which is Vinyl. It is rarely recycled and a tiny percentage of it is recycled into mats, speed bumps, cables, flooring, roadway gutters, mud flaps, paneling, and decks.

The “4” inside a triangle on a plastic container indicates LDPE, Low-Density Polyethylene, which is not often recycled and commonly found in shopping bags, squeezable bottles, carpet, furniture, clothing, tote bags, dry cleaning bags, and frozen food or bread bags.

The “5” inside a triangle on a plastic container means PP or Polypropylene which is one of the safer kinds of plastics. It is found in medicine bottles, straws, bottle caps, ketchup bottles, syrup bottles, and some yogurt containers. These can be recycled into trays, pallets, bins, rakes, bicycle racks, landscape borders, ice scrapers, auto battery cases, brushes, brooms, battery cables and signal lights.

The “6” inside a triangle on a plastic bottle or container indicates Styrofoam or Polystyrene, which is generally considered to be tough to recycle, due to its low density. It is found in disposable cups and plates, compact disc cases, aspirin bottles, carry-out containers, egg cartons, and meat trays.

Any plastics that do not fall under the above six types has “7” in a triangle on it. It is a mixed bag of different plastic items that include polycarbonate. It contains toxic



BPA, which is bisphenol-A. This kind of plastic is very harmful to health as it can cause reproductive problems, hyperactivity, infertility, and other hormone disruptions. It is normally found in nylon, certain food containers, signs and displays, iPod and computer cases, DVDs, sunglasses, bulletproof materials, and three- and five-gallon water bottles.

Recyclable aluminium

This symbol indicates that aluminium packaging can be recycled or the item is made from recyclable aluminium.



Silk Mark

It is a Quality Assurance label. It helps to identify pure silk. Silk Mark was launched in 2004. These are affixed only on pure silk products by the authorised users of Silk Mark. Each label has a hologram and a unique number printed on it, which helps the consumer trace the product back to the authorised user. It promotes natural silk.



Steel

This symbol indicates that the product is made from recyclable steel or can be recycled.



Tidyman Symbol

The Tidyman is the icon found on product packaging, which encourages people to dispose of the packaging after use. This symbol asks not to litter. It does not relate to recycling, but is a reminder to be a good citizen, disposing of the item in the most appropriate manner.



USDA ORGANIC

In accordance with the Organic Foods Production Act of 1990, the National Organic Program (NOP) housed within the USDA set criteria for the processing and handling of food. Some of these standards include the absence of pesticides, fertilizers, antibiotics, and growth hormones. The NOP provides a worksheet to help define all of the variables in their organic labeling.



Wool Mark

The Woolmark logo is a quality symbol. It means that the item of clothing is made from 100% pure new wool. Wool is 100% biodegradable, so at the end of the life of each wool garment, valuable nutrients are released back into the earth.



World Wide Fund for Nature

Its mission is to stop the degradation of the planet's natural environment, and build a future in which people live in harmony with nature. Featuring the panda logo, on apparel and any item highlights protecting the future of nature worldwide.



WQA Gold Seal

The Water Quality Association Gold Seal programme offers this certification to any product that comes into contact with drinking water, like pipes, fittings, faucets, water filters and water purifiers. Apart from these, there are also ISO 14000 certifications awarded to organisations that follow environmental laws and regulations, and control their environmental impact.



THE WATER QUALITY ASSOCIATION
GOLD SEAL

Source:

1. <http://www.ecolabelindex.com/ecolabels/>
2. <https://www.thebalance.com/what-recycling-symbols-mean-4126251>
3. <http://www.thealternative.in/lifestyle/eco-labels-a-step-towards-green-consumerism/>

