

PRODUCTS

The paper field and eco-sustainable products and processes: the role of the Ecolabel

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The paper industry. In the field of paper, producers have for some time now been focusing their business on the product's environmental sustainability - an increasingly insistent demand by consumers. They have made efforts to reduce their environmental impact on different fronts: optimizing their production cycle in terms of energy, consumption and emissions; ensuring environmental protection of the resources employed in the entire Forest Chain of Custody, and last but not least, enhancing the ecological characteristics of the products they launch on the market. "Over 60% of the paper and cardboard produced in Italy comes from ISO 14001- and/or EMAS-certified systems, while in the course of the last 14 years, the use of water per product unit has been reduced by 40% and energy requirements by 20%," states Massimo Medugno, Managing Director of Assocarta1. In the paper field, the number of Forest Chain of Custody certificates is growing pursuant to the FSC and PEFC schemes (www.fsc-italia.it) while consumers are focusing increasing attention on a product's environmental certification.

THE EVOLUTION OF THE ECOLABEL FOR PAPER PRODUCTS. The EU ECOLABEL for ecological quality (CE Norm n. 66/2010) is without a doubt the most widely acknowledged and appreciated label in Europe by the population, who recognizes it as synonymous of reliability and impartiality. It rewards the best products and services from an environmental point of view, which can thus distinguish themselves from market competitors, all the while maintaining high performance standards. Paper, in all its variants that can use the ECOLABEL, is one of the matrixes on which the European Community has focused greater attention in the definition of ecological quality criteria (see Table 1). In Italy, 24 licenses for tissue paper and 3 licenses for copying and graphic paper have been granted.

HOW TO OBTAIN THE ECOLABEL. License for use of the Ecolabel is granted by the Italian Ecolabel-Ecoaudit Committee following an attentive investigation by ISPRA (Istituto Superiore Protezione e Ricerca Ambientale - Institute for Environmental Protection and Research) (www.isprambiente.gov.it), that highlights how the process of granting the label "is based on a multi-criteria system, characteristic of Type I labels (ISO 14024), applied to the products divided into groups. The ecological criteria for each group of products are defined using an approach known as "cradle to grave" (Life Cycle Assessment - LCA), which detects the impact of products on the environment during all the stages of their life cycle, starting with the extraction of the raw materials, where aspects aimed at qualifying and selecting suppliers are involved, passing through manufacturing processes, where the impacts of the manufacturing company are controlled, to distribution (including packaging) and use, up for disposal at end of their life cycle." 2 The criteria are focused on aspects such as energy consumption, water and air pollution, savings in natural resources, environmental safety and soil protection. To these, fitness for use criteria are added.

THE PREPARATION PHASE OF THE DOSSIER FOR TISSUE PAPER IS IMPORTANT AND COMPLEX. After identifying the individual products to be certified, normally belonging to a certain range or line, the applicant will have to obtain the information and the declarations required for chemical products, cellulose, energy consumption, production mixes from his/her suppliers and from within his/her company. Secondly, he/she will have to perform analytical surveys on atmosphere emissions and in waste water and carry out product analyses (safety of the product and fitness for use) on the productions.

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Since 1997, ECOL STUDIO is the only laboratory in Italy authorized by the Ministry for Economic Development to perform the analyses established for the independent control of the ecological quality label (ECOLABEL) for paper products, for all the matrixes established by the different criteria. Through its own technicians within the EUEB (European Union Ecolabelling Board), ECOL STUDIO guarantees constant updating regarding norms and techniques and the most appropriate support to deal with the issues that can emerge during the path to obtaining the label, identifying technical, product and process solutions.

The time necessary to obtain licensing goes from 4 to 6 months. Besides application costs and costs for the analytical services necessary to prove conformity to the criteria upon application request and later - for maintaining the license - the licensee pays an annual fee for the rights to use the label based on his/her company's turnover in relation to the private label products. Cost ceilings are established. •