



# Ecolabels for cleaning products

Sustainability is becoming increasingly important. Cleaning products contribute to a more sustainable society by extending the lifetime of our products and buildings, furthermore they play an essential role in our hygiene and well-being. In addition to this intrinsic contribution to sustainability, producers and suppliers of cleaning products may choose to go one step further and make the various aspects of the product life cycle more sustainable, for example by complying with the requirements of a particular ecolabel. There is a wide variety of labels and certification schemes that assess the sustainability aspects of cleaning products. In addition, sustainability claims can also be made by companies themselves. This document, drawn up by the NVZ - Clean | Hygienic | Sustainable<sup>1</sup>, provides an overview of the various ecolabels that exist for detergents and cleaning products.<sup>2</sup>

## Introduction

First of all, it is important to know that cleaning products marketed within the European Union must comply with strict legislation that ensures a high level of protection for human health and the environment. The environmental impact is therefore always taken into account in the development of cleaning products, regardless of whether a product has a green label or claim. For more information on green claims, see the document of the NVZ about this topic. This document can be found [here](#).

## Which label is the best?

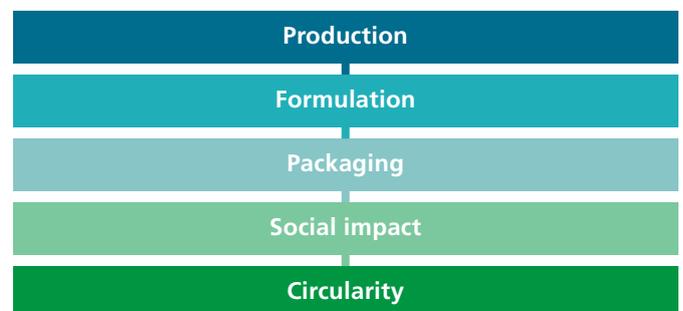
For purchasing agents or consumers, it would be convenient if one ecolabel could be designated as 'the best label'. In practice, however, this is not possible, because different labels assess different aspects. These different aspects are further explained below.

Because ecolabels must be verified by an external party, they give a reliable indication of products where extra attention has been paid to sustainability. However, it is not the case that a product without an ecolabel is by definition not sustainable. For example, for a number of product categories within the cleaning products sector, there is little choice of ecolabels or even no label at all at product level.

There are also cleaning products without ecolabels that do meet sustainability criteria. Furthermore, there are costs associated with the use of an ecolabel, which means that it is also a financial choice to go for a label. Smaller companies in particular may not always have the financial resources to bear the costs of a label, even though they do meet the criteria of such a label.

## Aspects of ecolabels

There are different ecolabels for cleaning products. Each ecolabel has its own criteria. If we look at all the aspects that an ecolabel can assess, we can broadly distinguish between the following five categories:



<sup>1</sup> The NVZ - Clean | Hygienic | Sustainable is the trade association of manufacturers and suppliers of detergents, cleaning agents, maintenance products and disinfection equipment. The NVZ functions as a knowledge centre in the field of the three values (clean, hygienic and sustainable).

<sup>2</sup> This overview does not claim to be complete. These are the ecolabels that, as far as the NVZ knows, are most commonly used for cleaning products.

Among other things, **production** is about the efficient use of energy during the production process. This is particularly evident when looking at company certification.

**Formulation** looks at the environmental impact of the ingredients within the product. This concerns the composition. For this, the impact of the ingredients when they end up in the (aqueous) environment is considered. In addition, the origin of the ingredients is often taken into account; are they, for example, made from renewable raw materials or petroleum based?

There are, of course, several sustainability aspects associated with **packaging**, including the possibility of recycling and the use of recycle within packaging. It can also be determined whether an effort has been made to minimise the amount of packaging material.

In short, **social impact** is about the impact of a product on society. For example, it looks at the labor conditions in all phases of the production process. This includes the extraction of raw materials. In addition, information on safe use and user-friendliness, such as a good dosage system, can be considered.

**Circularity** can be seen as the ultimate goal towards a more sustainable world. In a circular economy, there is no waste and raw materials are reused over and over again. By closing a circle (and thus moving towards circularity) something can technically continue indefinitely and therefore optimal sustainability is achieved. In fact, you could say that all other aspects must be sufficiently sound to achieve circularity. The

use phase is also important in this respect. A label can include this in the assessment of a product by checking whether the product provides information on sustainable use.

This overview indicates for each label which aspects are taken into consideration.

## Company and product certification

In addition to the various aspects within sustainability that a label can assess, a distinction can also be made between labels that are available at product level and at company or production site level. This document also distinguishes between them.

## External verification

An important point is the validation of an ecolabel, also called external verification. Ecolabels (and certification schemes in general) are subject to legislation. This means, among other things, that an external verification must take place. The labels listed in this overview are reliable and independent and therefore use external verification.

Unfortunately, some logos that can be found on the market do not meet the requirements of an official label. If you come across a label on a cleaning product that is not listed here and you have doubts about its reliability, you can always contact NVZ - Clean | Hygienic | Sustainable via [info@nvz.nl](mailto:info@nvz.nl) or +31 30 6921880.

## Labels

## Product labels

The product labels issue a certification at product level. This means that they look at sustainability criteria which are about the product. So the focus is often on the ingredients and the packaging, but there may also be requirements for production. It also means that a company can choose to have one particular product line certified, while other products from the same company do not have this certification. Below is an overview of the different sustainability labels that exist for cleaning products at product level.

### Charter for Sustainable Cleaning



The Charter for Sustainable Cleaning is the flagship voluntary sustainability initiative of the European cleaning and maintenance products industry. The aim is to encourage the whole industry to undertake continual improvement in terms of sustainability and to also encourage consumers to adopt more sustainable ways of doing their washing, cleaning and household maintenance. The Charter has two different certification logos. One is the product logo. The product logo (with the green border) may only be used if the company in question is also a company member of the Charter (for more information on this, see the description under company labels). For a number of product categories, additional category-specific requirements have been drawn up within the Charter. This concerns the following categories: professional building care products, hand and machine dishwashing detergents, all-purpose cleaners and floor cleaners, liquid toilet cleaners, laundry detergents, fabric softeners and household trigger spray cleaners. This logo can be found on the front of the packaging.

Sustainability aspects	
Production	✓
Formulation	✓
Packaging	✓
Social impact	✓
Circularity	✓

### Cradle to cradle



The Cradle to Cradle principle was developed by Prof. Dr. Michael Braungart and William McDonough. The central idea of the philosophy behind cradle to cradle is that all the materials used, after one product lifecycle, can be usefully applied in another product. Naturally, this leads to circularity. The Cradle to Cradle® certification includes a detailed evaluation model for assessing the materials used, their recyclability, energy and water consumption and the social impact of product cycles and production methods. This international certification has five levels: basic, bronze, silver, gold and platinum. To qualify for it, you are checked for the composition of the materials, possibilities for reusing the materials, use of renewable energy, sustainable water management and social justice. This certification can be requested for the formulation and/or packaging of cleaning products.

Sustainability aspects	
Production	✓
Formulation	✓
Packaging	✓
Social impact	✓
Circularity	✓

### Ecocert



Ecocert is a label that focuses on the formulation of a product. The use of renewable raw materials, preferably of organic origin, is encouraged. Furthermore, the label requires products to indicate the percentage of natural and organic ingredients in the product.

Sustainability aspects	
Production	
Formulation	✓
Packaging	
Social impact	
Circularity	✓

## Ecogarantie



Ecogarantie is a Belgian quality mark. For the certification of cleaning products, mainly environmental requirements are imposed on the product. For example, raw materials based on petroleum are not allowed (with the exception of a number of preservatives), and in case of vegetable extracts they must be fully organic. In addition, the company must have an environmental plan and there are requirements for packaging and the biodegradability of ingredients in sewage. The owner of the label is Probila-Unitrab, a professional association of processors and distributors in organic agriculture.

Sustainability aspects	
Production	
Formulation	✓
Packaging	✓
Social impact	✓
Circularity	✓

## EU Ecolabel



The EU Ecolabel is seen as the official European ecolabel. It imposes strict requirements on the formulation of a product; for example, ingredients may not be toxic to aquatic organisms. There are also environmental requirements for the packaging: no aerosols with propellants and as much recycled content as possible. The European Union is the owner of the label, but each Member State has appointed an organisation to manage the label. In the Netherlands this is Stichting Milieukeur. In addition to cleaning products, this label can also be found on clothing, building materials and cosmetics.

Sustainability aspects	
Production	✓
Formulation	✓
Packaging	✓
Social impact	✓
Circularity	✓

## Nordic Swan Ecolabel



The Nordic Ecolabel is a Scandinavian ecolabel. This label focuses on the formulation of products. Thus, requirements are mainly set on the ingredients that are used in the product. There are also environmental requirements for the packaging: for example, PVC is prohibited and as much recycled material as possible must be used.

Sustainability aspects	
Production	
Formulation	✓
Packaging	✓
Social impact	
Circularity	✓

## Company labels

**Company certification labels issue a certification at the company or site level. If a company has several production sites, some company certifications can also be obtained for one of these sites, without the certification applying to the entire company. Below the company labels for producers and suppliers of cleaning products are discussed.**

## EMAS



EMAS is the only label in this list from which the logo will not be found on products. The use of the logo on packaging and products is prohibited by the European Parliament. EMAS certification is a corporate certification that can be obtained by production sites that give priority to environmental management. This includes efficient use of raw materials and energy.

Sustainability aspects	
Production	✓
Formulation	✓
Packaging	✓
Social impact	
Circularity	✓

## Charter for Sustainable Cleaning



The Charter for Sustainable Cleaning is a voluntary initiative of European manufacturers of cleaning and maintenance products. In addition to the previously described product logo, the Charter includes a company logo. Companies that join the Charter must continuously work to improve the safety and well-being of consumers, customers and employees, and to reduce their environmental impact. Affiliated companies can make this visible by placing the company logo on the back of the packaging.

The Charter focuses on the entire lifecycle of the product, looking not only at the environmental impact but also, for example, at educating consumers about safe and sustainable use. All phases of the product's lifecycle are considered: from the manufacturing phase to the disposal phase of the product.

Score	
Production	✓
Formulation	✓
Packaging	✓
Social impact	✓
Circularity	✓

## ISO sustainability standards at a glance

In addition to labels, there are also a number of ISO standards in the context of sustainability. The International Organisation for Standardisation (ISO) is an independent international organisation that sets standards. The organisation is a partnership of national standardisation organisations in 163 countries. There are many different ISO standards for all kinds of processes. For some ISO-standards, it is possible to be certified as a company. Below is a brief overview of the most important ISO standards relating to sustainability. These ISO standards apply on company level.

- ISO 20400: Standard for sustainable procurement. It comprises guidelines and does not contain any stringent requirements. It is not possible to become certified for this standard. An evaluation of this standard will start in 2020, after which there may be a certification option in the form of ISO 20401.
- ISO 26000: This standard provides tools to support organisations in fulfilling their social responsibility in a 'tailor-made' way. ISO 26000 provides answers to the what and how of Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR). The guideline provides clear definitions and delineation of CSR and sustainable development. In addition, the guideline provides tools for implementing CSR in an organisation. Just like ISO 20400, ISO 26000 is a guideline and therefore not suitable or intended for certification.
- ISO 14001: This is the international standard with requirements for an environmental management system. The environmental management system is used to develop an environmental policy appropriate to the organisation and to safeguard its implementation. The basis for the environmental management system is the 'plan-do-check-act' cycle (PDCA). Companies can obtain certification for this standard.
- ISO 9001: This standard specifies requirements for a quality management system for an organisation that, on the one hand, must demonstrate its ability to consistently deliver products and services that meet customer requirements and comply with applicable laws and regulations and, on the other hand, aims to increase customer satisfaction. Companies can also be certified for this standard.
- ISO 50001: Energy Management in the broad sense of the word gives substance to the structural improvement of energy consumption and thus to cost savings. This standard provides a harmonised method for comparing energy saving methods.