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Celebrating 20 Years of the EU Ecolabel!

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Spotlight on a longstanding licence holder: the Danish company, Gabriel A/S

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Agenda and other issues

Happy New Year, from the EU Ecolabel Team!

From **22-27 January**, the Energies of the High North – Arctic Frontiers conference will be held in Tromsø, Norway.

News—Full article

Celebrating 20 Years of the EU Ecolabel!

In honour of the 20th Anniversary of the EU Ecolabel, this New Year's issue of the News Alert features a review of the history of the scheme. Established in 1992, the EU Ecolabel has seen tremendous growth: starting with just two product groups, Dishwashers and Washing Machines, the scheme now has 26 sets of criteria for non-food and non-medical product groups. However, the road has been a long a bumpy one.

Humble Beginnings

Criteria development for the various product groups was slow to get started, and it took time to develop a common methodology for setting criteria. The French Ministry of Environment in addition to several Nordic countries, who had already headed up some national labels, also contributed to this process.

In those early days, consumers and manufacturers alike could not see the benefits of an EU Ecolabel. As the methodology for criteria development was strengthened and the criteria themselves became more stringent, companies began to see how obtaining the EU Ecolabel could set them apart from competitors and consumers too began to be interested. In 1996, the first set of EU Ecolabel licences were awarded to six companies.

That same year, the Ecolabel's then most successful product group made its debut when Indoor and outdoor paints and Varnishes criteria were introduced. By that time, there were nine product groups, four of which still had no licence holders.

Gaining Momentum

In 2000 the EU Ecolabel had expanded to include 15 product groups, an increase of five product group categories. Still the number of licences remained relatively low, at only 53. To date those numbers have increased drastically, skyrocketing to over a thousand licences.

While some EU countries like Denmark, Italy and France, took a keen interest in the scheme early on, in other Member States the EU Ecolabel had a slow start. Henning Scholtz from the German Competent Body recalls how the EU Ecolabel gained footing in Germany ten years after its creation, when criteria for All Purpose and Sanitary Cleaners, a product group that had not yet been covered by the national label, were introduced. An EU Ecolabel Fashion



The EU Ecolabel's 10th Anniversary Fashion Show.

Show was also held that year to promote the scheme, he said.

A better-defined application process was one reason for the increased success of the EU Ecolabel in later years. In those early years, even after criteria were defined, Competent Bodies were faced with the challenge of how to evaluate applications. Tina Hansen, of Ecolabelling Denmark, recalls an experience with a non-EU applicant for the EU Ecolabel which had required a detailed translation of a letter that simply stated the company's interest in obtaining the EU Ecolabel, with no supporting documentation attached. Today the process is more formally defined, with detailed checklists for required elements. "The heightened professionalism of applications is evident," says Ms. Hansen.

Early on, Competent Bodies often footed the costs of self-financing because application fees were not sufficient to cover staffing. With the increasing visibility of the Ecolabel and an increasing number of companies seeking licences, some Competent Bodies are now able to look at initiatives to actively market and promote the EU. In Germany, a new EU Ecolabel webpage is being created!

Looking Forward

In April 2009, a proposal released as part of the SCP (Sustainable Consumption and Production) Action Plan, was voted by European Parliament. Ecolabel Regulation E(C) 66/2010 aims to minimise bureaucracy and increase product group development. This recent revision of the scheme aims at a total of 40-50 established product groups by 2015, enabling consumers to make more environmentally sustainable choices in their everyday lives and widening the scope for applications from across diverse sectors. The European Commission has also expressed hopes that the Ecolabel will be a key instrument in sustainable consumption policy, working in tandem with instruments that track the "carbon footprint" or ecological impacts of products in the future.

Please see a timeline on EU Ecolabel history below.

Spotlight on a longstanding licence holder: the Danish company Gabriel A/S

"When we first incorporated the EU Ecolabel system, it was to help our sales and company," said Kurt Nedergaard, Business Manager for Quality, Environment and Production of Gabriel A/S, a furniture textile manufacturing company based in Aalborg, Denmark. "Now it is more integrated into our whole environmental system." Gabriel became the first manufacturer of upholstery fabrics to be awarded the EU Ecolabel in 2002 and recounts its ten years of experience with the EU Ecolabel.

The company has been working on minimising their environmental impact for 20 years and now has 19 EU Ecolabelled fabrics. "Looking into many EU environmental tools, we noticed the Ecolabel," Mr. Nedergaard said. He has been working at Gabriel since 1988. The EU Ecolabel, according to him, was the right tool for the company's needs.

Mr. Nedergaard suggested that the EU Ecolabel caught Gabriel's attention years ago because its focus is on the entire life cycle of a product, encompassing the whole supply chain. "Our supply chain extends around the world, and the EU Ecolabel criteria are easily and clearly communicated to our partners," he said.

Amongst all environmental certifications, "the most efficient are the EU Ecolabel

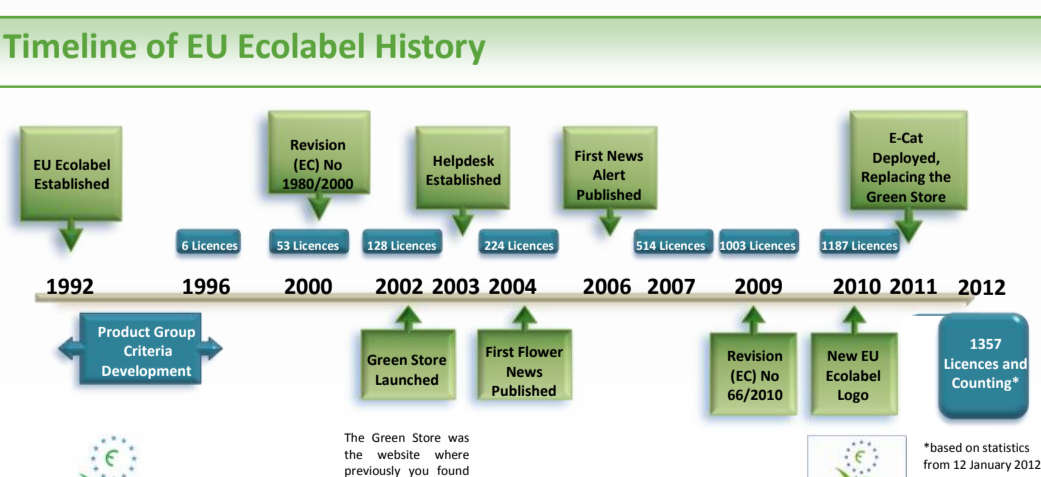
and Oeko-Tex," says Mr. Nedergaard. Oeko-Tex is a textile-specific label that certifies products have been tested against chemicals that are harmful to humans. "We do not see a conflict between labels. We see a synergy between the EU Ecolabel and these other environmental certifications."

Gabriel is also active in the EU Ecolabel community. During the company's initial application process over a decade ago, Mr. Nedergaard remembers establishing a good rapport with the Danish Competent Body. "The Danish Competent Body adheres to the established standards and deals with tasks and each case in a professional manner," he said. Mr. Nedergaard remembers the company taking part in Denmark's EU Ecolabel Month in October 2011, helping to increase recognition of the label in Denmark.

According to Mr. Nedergaard, the EU Ecolabel has sustained interest from environmentally-invested companies like Gabriel because it is "based on the interest of all EU countries, is regulated very professionally and is a fair scheme."

For more information about Gabriel A/S, visit their website at: www.gabriel.dk/.

Timeline of EU Ecolabel History



Timeline of major events in EU Ecolabel history.

Agenda and other issues

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