

Cleaning products: the use of official ecolabels

CITY OF ESBJERG, DENMARK

Procurement objectives

In 2005, the city of Esbjerg wanted to purchase cleaning products. Esbjerg aimed to provide a good example for their citizens and private businesses by showing them that it is possible to purchase cleaning products with the lowest possible environmental impact. Esbjerg municipality was convinced of the importance of using ecolabels in their tender, but thought that it was not so simple to use ecolabels in accordance with the EU Public Procurement Directives (2004/17/EC and 2004/18/EC).

Background

Denmark made its first GPP action plan in 1994. GPP criteria for 7 product groups are mandatory for local and regional authorities. Additionally, the city of Esbjerg, now the country's fifth-largest city, with 115,000 inhabitants, has committed itself to GPP as an instrument to achieve its ambitious internal environment targets.



Criteria used

Esbjerg asked for cleaning products that meet the underlying environmental specifications of recognized ecolabelled products. The public procurement Directives (2004/17/EC and 2004/18/EC) explicitly allow this by putting the ecolabel criteria in the technical specifications - under certain **conditions**. Products and services that bear an ecolabel are presumed to comply with the technical specifications. It is, however, not permitted to set a requirement for companies to possess a certain ecolabel nor to be (fully) compliant with a certain ecolabel. Other suitable evidence such as a test report from a recognised body or a technical dossier from the manufacturer must also be accepted as proof. Any other form of proof must be accepted. In this case, Esbjerg asked the suppliers to meet certain environmental specifications of one of the following ecolabels: EU Ecolabel, Scandinavian "Swan", German "Blauer Engel" or Swedish "Bra Miljöval".

Results

Most of the received offers proposed cleaning products labelled with one of the ecolabels mentioned above. Only a few suppliers had to prove that their cleaning products complied with tender requirements by using another, equivalent, verification method. The city found that the ecolabelled cleaning products were not more expensive than conventional products. The feedback they received from suppliers was mainly positive (only one supplier explained that he refused to use ecolabels because of the costs involved; however he provided a technical dossier from the manufacturer to prove his products were compliant with the tender requirements).

Environmental impacts

Cleaning products can have serious effects on the environment: air pollution, ozone formation (smog), bioaccumulation or food chain exposure, hazardous effects on aquatic organisms and degradation of water quality. In addition, cleaning product packaging generates waste. Some cleaning products also contain solvents that are classified as harmful to human health and have a negative impact on the occupational health of employees.

These negative impacts can best be reduced by both excluding certain hazardous substances from the products that are purchased, but also by minimising the amount of products/chemicals used in carrying out cleaning services.

Lessons learned

The purchase of "green" cleaning products can be achieved easily thanks to certain criteria used in ecolabels. Besides, green cleaning products do not cost more than conventional ones and are sometimes even cheaper. A [study](#) showed that almost 80% of cleaning products and services procured in Denmark were certified by an ecolabel (or comply with its criteria) resulting in a CO₂ equivalent reduction of 43% and a cost reduction of more than 3% in 2006/2007.

For more information, please see the European [GPP criteria](#) for cleaning products and the "[Buying Green](#)" handbook.