

The EU Flower

The European Union's Environmental Quality Mark



What is the EU Flower?

- The EU flower is a symbol of superior environmental quality and is available to a range of products and services (see opposite).
- The scheme, which has been designed and is overseen by the European Commission, sets out specific ecological criteria that products must comply with to be certified as environmentally friendly.
- The award of the label is independently verified and endorsed by the European Commission.
- The EU Flower is a recognised environmental quality mark across the countries of the EU and in Norway and Liechtenstein.

What are the Benefits?

Legal Compliance – Integrated Product Policy (IPP)

A key step in assessing a product for the EU Flower is the completion of an environmental lifecycle assessment. The EU is currently introducing an IPP that will use instruments such as greener standards and environmental taxes to force producers to take account of the environmental impact of their products throughout their lifecycle. Products with the EU Flower will have been assessed for such impacts and will usually comply with these schemes.

Opening New Markets

The EU Flower is recognised across the EU and has been shown to help sales in other EU markets.

Reducing Costs

Cleaner production required to reach Eco-label criteria can be cheaper and more efficient. It also prevents potential costs associated with waste and pollution.

Preferred Supplier

There is a demand for environmentally friendly products among consumers and retailers. As a symbol of environmental quality the EU Flower could help you to become a preferred supplier – particularly in the Government sector.

Eliminates confusion about the overall impact of the product:

The whole life cycle is assessed so consumers are confident that the product is environmentally superior from cradle to grave.

Confidence

The EU Flower is independently verified – environmental claims are endorsed and verified by the EU.

Trustworthy: an EU scheme

Research shows that the EU is one of the most trusted sources of environmental information for Irish people.

Is financial assistance available to Irish companies?

There are two schemes run in Ireland that offer financial support for creating greener products. Products that have undergone both schemes would leave SME's with the life cycle data necessary to apply for the EU Flower.

1 Environmentally Superior Products Scheme

This scheme is designed to support indigenous Irish SME's in examining ways to reduce the environmental impact of an existing product or that of a new product in development.

The ESP grant supports a life cycle assessment to examine where environmental improvements can be made, undertake market research, determine the technical feasibility of the proposed changes and make an assessment of costs associated with the changes.

What is the Grant?

The maximum value of the grant is €31,740. It can be used to cover up to 50% of evaluating the feasibility of developing an environmentally superior product. Specifically the grant can be used to cover:

- Salary and wages of staff engaged in the study
- The cost of technical consultants used
- Materials and prototype related expenses
- Travel and subsistence costs

2 Cleaner Greener Production Programme

This programme is run by the Environmental Protection Agency as part of the National Development Plan. The programme is open to all sectors and any business can apply (there is a specific emphasis on SMEs).

What is the Grant?

The grant can be used to cover between 25 and 50% of project costs between €6,500 and €100,000. The grant is designed for businesses that aim to improve their environmental performance and publicise the results. Relevant activities include the opportunities for reduction of environmental impacts, staff training, capital investment and project publicity.

"Greening" the product lifecycle is one area in which grants are available under the CGPP. This would cover the cost of undertaking the lifecycle assessment that is necessary in obtaining the EU Flower.

Product Categories

Tissue Paper
Copying Paper
Dishwashers
Light Bulbs
Bed Mattresses
Personal Computers
Detergents for dishwashers
Footwear
Portable Computers
Paints and Varnishes
Textile Products
Refrigerators
Laundry Detergents
Soil Improvers
Washing-up Liquid
Tourist Accommodation
Furniture
Hard Floor Coverings
Television
Vacuum Cleaners
All Purpose Cleaners

How to apply

- 1 Check to see if your product has a published EU Eco-label
- 2 Undertake a product life-cycle assessment focussing on the criteria set for each product by the EU Commission
- 3 Supply all test data to the National Standards Authority of Ireland (NSAI)
- 4 NSAI notifies the Commission of compliance with the criteria
- 5 EU Commission publishes the award across the EU
- 6 The flower symbol is displayed on the product along with written information outlining the product's environmental benefits

Emphasis on Green Supply from Government

Central Government purchasing – through the Government Supplies Agency (GSA) - accounts for over €50 million worth of goods per year. The European Commission have recently stated that public procurements represent 16% of the EU's GDP, a vast section of the market which public authorities can use to drive the greening of products. This involves the purchase of everything from envelopes to cleaning products to furniture. The increased focus on green procurement by the Department of Environment, Heritage and Local Government and the GSA (which buys in bulk for Government departments) opens additional opportunities for suppliers of environmentally friendly products. The EU Flower can play a part here.

"The Department of Environment, Heritage and Local Government is actively encouraging all Government departments to purchase greener goods. We believe that public procurement can really make a difference in encouraging suppliers to offer more environmentally friendly products. At the end of the day the greater the demand, the more cost effective it will be to produce goods of a higher environmental standard. In any case, cleaner production is often more efficient and this saves money, it also cuts back on the potential costs associated with waste, packaging and pollution," says Fergus Doyle from the Department of Environment and Local Government.

The Government Supplies Agency (GSA), which has recently awarded a number of substantial contracts for the supply of stationary to Government departments, agrees with this philosophy. Continuing a growing trend over the last number of years, environmental requirements were included in these contracts. Increasingly the GSA prefers to award contracts to environmentally superior products where they are of similar quality and price in comparison to other offers. In reality this means that environmental criteria can be the deciding factor in the award of any contract. Nick O'Donoghue of the GSA illustrates this point, "We are increasingly trying to build environmental considerations into our contracts – it's an important area for us. In procurement we can often end up with two products that are similar in terms of price and quality. In cases like this environmental labels such as the Eco-label, that are independently verified, can make all the difference."

The Government Supplies Agency and the Department of Environment, Heritage and Local Government both recognise that products carrying the EU Flower are certified to be more environmentally friendly than equivalent products across the whole of their lifecycles. The GSA is currently examining the options for inserting the environmental requirements for the award of the EU Flower as criteria for a number of products purchased. As it stands, products that have been awarded the EU Flower meet the environmental criteria that public procurers value in deciding between offers and so can provide an advantage to suppliers trying to secure valuable public contracts.

For more information see links on the next page.

Sources of further information

- EU Flower Newsletter:
www.eco-label.com
- EU Commission Eco-label Website:
www.europa.eu.int/comm/environment/ecolabel/
- Enterprise Ireland:
www.envirocentre.ie
- Department of Environment and Local Government:
www.environ.ie
- National Standards Authority of Ireland:
www.nsai.ie
- Certification Europe:
www.certificationeurope.com
- IBEC:
www.ibec.ie



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