

# CERTIFICATION SCHEMES



Certification schemes and standards have a range of different purposes. Some are tools to guide a business in the steps to take to reach its goals and to help set those goals. Others are to show what a business has achieved: a certain performance level or benchmark. Others are for products, to demonstrate specified qualities, helping you and others make more sustainable choices. And there are standards to help with reporting or environmental statements. There are too many to present them all here: the selection shown is intended to represent the various types.

All are intended to help be transparent and objective and, where appropriate, to allow comparability. Using accepted standards or labelling systems and, ideally, using third party verification or certification helps avoid the greenwash trap.

This is now becoming a compliance issue, with statutory guidance and legislation being introduced in many places. Not all has been published yet, but an example from the UK government *Guidance for businesses on making environmental claims* is useful for the general principles:

- Claims must be truthful and accurate
- Claims must be clear and unambiguous
- Claims must not omit or hide important relevant information
- Comparisons must be fair and meaningful
- Claims must consider the full life cycle of the product or service
- Claims must be substantiated

## Products

There are many types of label or certification for products. Some of them look at just one part of a product's life cycle, such as forestry standards, some look at a particular aspect of a product, such as the [US EnergyStar](#) for energy efficiency and the [US GreenGuard](#) for chemical emissions, and others look at the whole life cycle, such as the [EU Ecolabel](#) and regional labels such as [Nordic Swan](#) and the [German Blue Angel](#).

There are also labels for specific sectors, such as [OEKO-TEX](#) for textiles and leather.

If you see a label and are unfamiliar with what it means, look on its website: there should be detailed information about what is required for it.

The main thing is to look for those based on objective and transparent criteria, and either verified or awarded by an independent third party or backed by solid evidence.

## Management system standards

[The International Organisation for Standardization \(ISO\)](#) works globally, with more than 160 national standards bodies, to develop common standards across the world, which is important for international trade. Probably its best-known outputs in this industry are the management system standards; there are also ISO standards for environmental labelling, product specification standards and many more.

[Management systems](#) set out the steps an organisation needs to take to understand, manage and improve its performance in a set topic area, such as environment. A significant advantage of these is their universal recognition: any potential customer requiring assurance on environment will know that certification to ISO 14001 shows an organisation is systematically managing its environmental impact, ISO 50001 that it's managing its energy use. Third-party certification gives the assurance that the standard is being correctly followed, the organisation is improving, and compliance requirements are being managed and evidence of outcomes is held.

## Reporting standards

These set out how and what an organisation should report; to see more about this see the Brands content.

If reporting on carbon emissions, the [GHG Protocol](#) shows what should be taken into account and how they should be calculated; for sustainability reports, examples are the [GRI](#) and, linking finance and sustainability, [SASB](#).