

Environment Canada program aids product-identification

Environment Canada's Environmental Choice Program is helping consumers identify products like reusable diapers and recycled motor oil which ease the burden on the environment.

To date, products made by 10 manufacturers had qualified for the Environmental Choice EcoLogo consisting of three doves intertwined to form a stylized maple leaf. Consumers can find this mark on re-refined lubricating oil, construction material made from recycled wood-based cellulose fibre, plastic products using recycled plastic, water-based paints, fine paper from recycled papers and cloth diapers.

The EcoLogo is granted for display on a product if the item, which the supplier voluntarily submits for consideration, is found to meet the requirements of the relevant Environmental Choice guideline(s). Guidelines for 11 types of products have been published as part of the program with the Canadian Standards Association (CSA) participating as the technical agency under contract to Environment Canada.

In addition to the products already mentioned, published guidelines are also available for miscellaneous products from recycled paper, newsprint made from recycled paper, zinc-air batteries (used primarily in hearing aids), and heat recovery ventilators.

Copies of these guidelines can be obtained by contacting Ahmad Hussein, Project Manager with CSA's Standards Division, at CSA's Central Office in Rexdale (Toronto) at (416)747-2697.

The three doves that make up the EcoLogo represent the three segments of society-consumer, industry and environment-that are working together to improve Canada's environment.

Any product which is made, used or disposed of in a way that causes significantly less harm to the environment than similar products, could be considered a sound environmental choice in the program. "A product" reads Environmental Choice literature, "may be certified because it is made in a way that improves energy efficiency, reduces hazardous by-products or uses recycled materials or because the product itself can be reused."

EcoLogo products are not described as "environmentally friendly" because the Environmental Choice Board does not want to suggest that these items are entirely harmless to the environment. Although few consumer products have no negative environmental impact, it is pointed out in program literature that products are certified by Environmental Choice because they produce a net environmental benefit in comparison to other conventional products and thus help reduce the burden on the environment.

The EcoLogo is put on a package label along with a brief statement of the reason why the product has been certified. A full description of the criteria for certification, specific to each type of product, is contained in the Environmental Choice guidelines.

In addition to the 11 existing guidelines, draft guidelines have been developed for alternative fuels (ethanol), diaper services, sanitary paper made from recycle paper, packaging, alkaline batteries, energy-efficient appliances and dishwasher detergents. The public review period is finished for all these drafts, except for diaper services. The public review for the diaper services criteria ends July 11.

Product suppliers such as manufacturers, importers and retailers can apply for the EcoLogo after the relevant guideline has been developed for their product by contacting CSA. As the technical agency for the Environmental Choice Program, CSA provides applicants with a kit containing copies of the relevant guidelines, an application form, a copy of the licensing agreement

and information on fees involved. When the application is completed, CSA arranges for a plant visit to determine if the product and/or process meets the program criteria set by the Environmental Choice Board.

Contracts for the use of the EcoLogo are established for a specified period of time, up to three years. During this period, CSA makes annual verifications of continued compliance with the guidelines.

Parties interested in applying to have their product certified with the EcoLogo through the Environmental Choice Program should contact CSA Engineer Jack Poon, at (416)747-4369. Environmental Choice officials will announce product certifications from time to time.

The Environmental Choice Board invites both consumers and product suppliers to mail their suggestions for new guidelines to Environmental Choice Director Graham Hardman at the program office, 107 Sparks Street, Second Floor, Ottawa, Ont. K1A 0H3. General inquiries can be mailed to the same address or directed to program officials using the office fax number, (613)952-9465.

"CSA sees the Environmental Choice Program as a great contribution to society and to the development of products that are environmentally sound," commented Mr. Hussein. "The great concern that consumers are showing for environmental issues in

general, and products in particular, was a consideration when management made the decision to work on this program."

The Environmental Choice Board, a group of 16 volunteers from across Canada who are appointed by the federal Environment Minister to manage the program at arm's length from the government, sets the criteria for the guidelines. Board members bring expertise in a range of fields including health care, environmental science, retailing, economics manufacturing and environmental

law, to their task. The Board is served by a secretariat within Environment Canada which has contracted CSA's assistance.

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