

The EU Ecolabel for Cleaning Services

Companies providing cleaning services are facing growing pressure to align their commercial, social and environmental practices. The new EU Ecolabel cleaning services criteria provide exigent guidelines for B2B and B2C cleaning companies looking to lower their environmental impact and guarantee the efficiency of their environmental actions through the third party verification. The seven mandatory and twelve optional criteria take a holistic approach through limits on the cleaning products and accessories used, water and energy consumption, the training of staff and waste management. The criteria also prioritises cleaning products that are ISO Type I labels such as the EU Ecolabel, but also Nordic Swan and Blue Angel.



Transition towards circular environmental practices

The EU Ecolabel criteria for cleaning services are relevant for companies with preexisting environmental practices looking to fine tune and structure their sustainability and corporate responsibility efforts through compliance with this third-party certification, as well as companies who seek to use the EU Ecolabel criteria to help them make a shift from a more linear way of functioning towards circular environmental practices. The label also demonstrates the companies' commitment to the well-being and safety of their employees by decreasing their exposure to toxic substances.



Any cleaning service company can apply for the EU Ecolabel: it is possible to certify a company's entire cleaning services, or certify part of the services provided, granted that they have separate accounting records. As of now, cleaning service companies that hold EU Ecolabel certificates are able to prove the efficiency of their environmental practices during green public procurement tenders.

Hotspots & Solutions

Cleaning services induce an array of environmental hotspots, which the EU Ecolabel addresses:

Hotspots	Issue	EU Ecolabel Solution
Hotspot 1: Human and environmental toxicity	<i>Toxic substances present in conventional cleaning products used by cleaning services have a detrimental impact on the environment as well as the consumers.</i>	EU Ecolabel cleaning services limit the polluting effects of their activities by using eco-friendly products : at least 50% of all cleaning products used per year must be environmentally certified by the EU Ecolabel or another EN ISO 14024 type I ecolabel, and the other 50% must follow specific criteria. For example, detergents must respect minimum thresholds for critical dilution volumes, have biodegradable surfactants and comply with strict restrictions on the number of hazardous substances present, no micro-plastics, phosphates, EDTA, triclosan, and formaldehyde added. They also cannot be determined as being acutely toxic, a respiratory or skin sensitiser, carcinogenic, mutagenic or toxic for reproduction and limited use of fragrances. Cleaning services can easily partner with existing EU Ecolabel cleaning product companies to fulfill this product-use requirement.
Hotspot 2: Inefficient Use of Detergents	<i>Low staff awareness on the appropriate cleaning procedures and unavailable dosing equipment leads to unnecessary overuse of detergents.</i>	To address potential inefficiencies in detergent product use, the criteria requires for all certified companies to undertake formal staff training and supply instructions to staff to ensure proper dosing of cleaning products used, the right use of dilution rates and the appropriate handling of cycles and temperatures. Staff performing EU Ecolabel indoor cleaning tasks must have access to automatic dispensers, measuring beakers/caps, hand pumps and sprays. High quality products are also required to minimise the need for excessive amounts of product.
Hotspot 3: Poor management of waste	<i>Inefficient waste disposal management and the use of non-recyclable products by cleaning service companies contribute to unnecessary waste as well as water, soil and air contamination.</i>	The criteria sets requirements for proper waste management and disposal in order to limit its generation, which is in line with the EU Waste Framework Directive (prioritising waste reduction at its source, followed by recycling, recovery and disposal.) In particular, in an effort to drive companies to reduce waste at its source, the criteria lays out that cleaning services must replace single use cleaning supplies (i.e. gloves) with durable and reusable products. Furthermore, at least 50% of cleaning textile accessories (cloths and mop heads) per year must be microfibre, which use less water. In order to meet this requirement, the criteria outlines an “optional criterion” to partner with existing EU Ecolabel textile companies and earn extra points depending on the percentage of mops and cloths used that are certified with the EU Ecolabel or other EN ISO 14024 type I ecolabel.

Hotspot 4: Inefficient energy & water use

Misguided washing cycle and temperature selections by cleaning staff lead to unnecessary energy and water consumption.

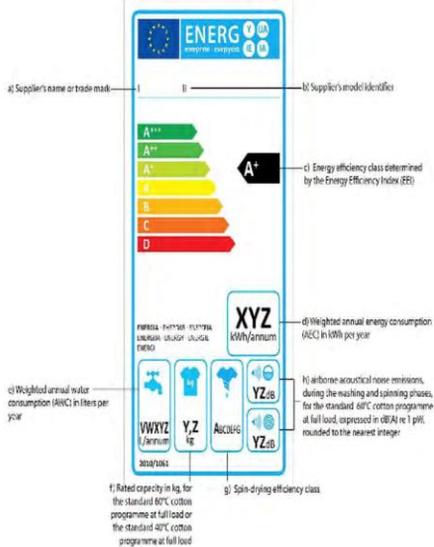


Figure 1. Energy Efficiency Label for household washing machines. © Source: European Commission, 2010.

Minimised energy and water consumption through the use of high quality and environmentally friendly detergents used, as well as frequent staff training is a forefront focus within the criteria. While EU Ecolabel detergents and other type I ecolabel detergents perform effectively with unheated water, the EU Ecolabel requires staff training so that all members are aware of how to optimise the use of cleaning products, for example by ensuring that less energy-intensive washing cycles and temperatures are used. EU Ecolabel detergents are highly efficient with 30° C water cycles, which helps reduce energy waste. Research has found that washing laundry at 30°C consumes three times less energy than if washed at 90° C and washing with cold water uses twice as less energy than when the water is at 40° C. The criteria outlines an “optional criterion” allowing companies to further reduce their energy consumption and earn extra points by owning or leasing household washing machines which comply with EU Energy Label rated class A++ or A+++ for energy efficiency.

<https://www.ademe.fr/sites/default/files/assets/documents/guide-pratique-reduire-facture-electricite.pdf>

Hotspot 5: Undefined environmental action plan

Without a defined environmental action plans, it is difficult for companies to monitor and measure their environmental performance and progress.

The EU Ecolabel helps companies take the steps to define targets and measure their actions by requiring an environmental management system with a precise environmental policy, action programme and internal evaluation process. The criteria promotes synergies between the EU Ecolabel and other existing third-party verified schemes. As an optional criterion, it is possible for companies to obtain extra points if certified with the Environmental Management and Audit Scheme (EMAS) or the ISO 14001 standard.

Hotspot 6: Transportation Emissions

Depending on the cleaning service, transportation to and from client locations can account for a large part of their activity. This transportation time contributes to carbon dioxide emissions that could be reduced through better transportation practices.

The EU Ecolabel aims to reduce the impact of transportation, by awarding companies with extra points if at least 50% of their vehicles meet European emission standard 6 (the acceptable limits for exhaust emissions for light passenger and commercial vehicles in EU and EEA member states) and at least 10% of their transportation is done with zero-emission vehicles. Points are also given to companies who have determined transport plans minimising fuel consumption.