

# SUSTAINABLE PROCUREMENT: GOING BEYOND CLAIMS AND LABELS

Interface explains how to distinguish reliable green claims from fake ones and how to get a better understanding of the real environmental impacts.

**T**oday, it seems that green claims are everywhere. In sorting through all of these claims, how can you be sure which ones are reliable and how can you get a better understanding of the real environmental impacts?

Because manufacturers report in different ways, making apples-to-apples comparisons of similar products can be challenging. It seems that an advanced degree in chemistry or chemical engineering is needed to sort through all of the detail. So, here are some tips that can help you cut through the claims and get a complete picture of the products you choose.

## 1. Look beyond environmental claims

Most of us trust the information manufacturers put in their marketing brochures and on their product labels, but unless this information is independently verified, the degree to which they can be relied upon as factual is questionable.

The best way to be sure about the environmental claims made by manufacturers is to look beyond their private labels and claims and seek third-party developed life cycle assessment (LCA) data. LCA is the key to getting a more complete picture about the whole of life impacts of a product.

**By asking questions about full product life cycle, a stronger business case for manufacturers to pursue EPDs is created.**

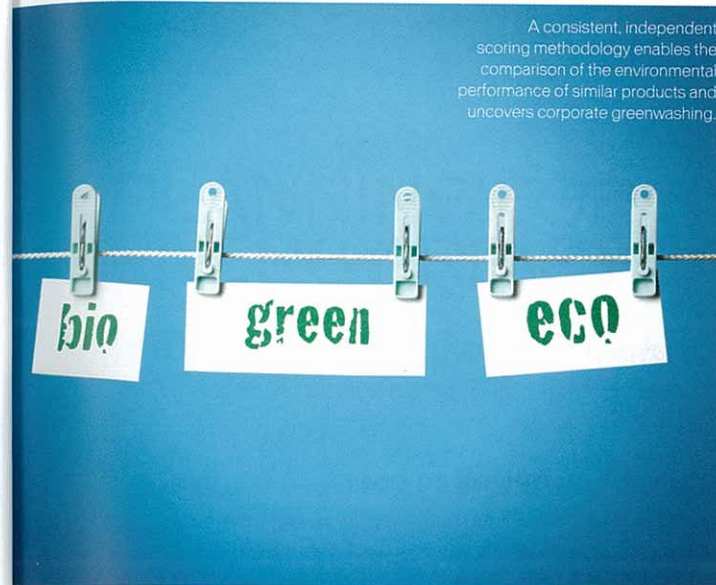
## 2. Look beyond Green Star approval for evidence of environmental impacts

Until recently all Green Star Level A products were rated the same – with no method available to determine which may be the best performing environmental option. The introduction of the Global GreenTagCert Certification Scheme (GreenTag) to the Australian market, however, has raised the bar, providing greater transparency for Green Star product procurement.

GreenTag is a globally recognised LCA-based certification that is recognised by the Green Building Council of Australia (GBCA) as a Good Environmental Choice Australia (GECA) third-party certifier equivalent for Green Star Materials Calculator credits. GreenTag also publishes ratings and scores in a number of environmental and health categories. A consistent, independent scoring methodology enables the comparison of the environmental performance of similar products and the confident choosing of the best performing option.

If specifically concerned about water consumption or resource depletion, uncovering the detail requires referral to a deeper level of information. This is where environmental product declarations (EPDs) play an important role. EPDs are summary LCA reports and disclose the actual data behind the environmental impacts associated with the entire life cycle of a product.

Primary energy and water consumption are reported not only for manufacturing or use phases, but also include impacts during the extraction and processing of raw materials, during transportation and in the generation of electricity. Capturing full life cycle impacts gives a more complete picture of the true water and primary energy footprint of a product and, by asking questions about full product life cycle, a stronger business case for manufacturers to pursue EPDs is created.



Some Australian manufacturers are already embracing the trend towards transparency and have released EPDs for their products. In 2012/2013, the Global GreenTag certification scheme will produce EPDs for all products under certification, creating unprecedented access to the environmental performance of products made in Australia.

## 3. Ask suppliers for third-party verified environmental data

How transparent is the supplier about the environmental impacts of their products? Are they verified by a third-party according to internationally recognised standards?

The new competitive product landscape centres on transparency. A broad range of manufacturers of building materials and interiors products are already using LCA and EPDs. In fact, data once considered to be proprietary, confidential product information is now being made public via tools like EPDs.

EPDs are based on the international standard ISO 14025 guidelines. In accordance with ISO 14025, EPDs must be verified by an external third party. This international standardisation of methodology and independent third-party verification means you can rely on the impact information as unbiased, factual and transparent. If a supplier cannot provide you with third-party verified environmental data, ask yourself, can you rely on their claims?

## 4. Decide which impacts matter most

An EPD discloses the detail, enabling independent determination of the largest environmental impacts. Regardless of where the greatest impacts occur, certain impact categories may matter more to a procurement process than others. EPDs provide a broad range of environmental impact scores, including scarce resource depletion, carbon emissions, changes to nutrients in water and soil, contributions to acid rain and ozone depletion.

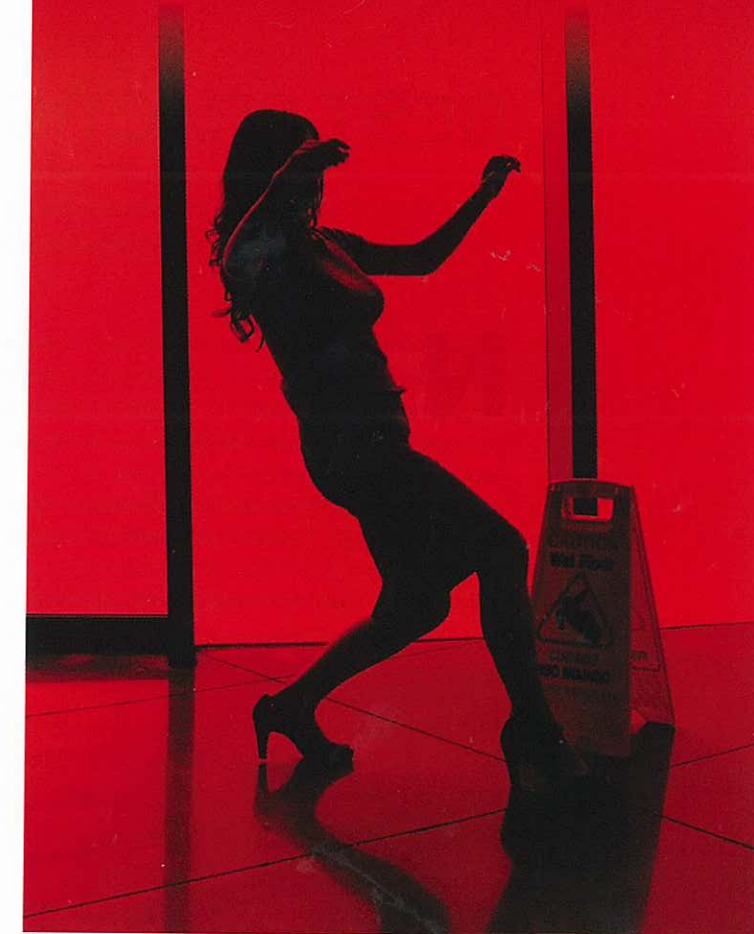
## COMPLETING THE PICTURE

Don't get distracted by a long list of eco-sexy green claims. Uncover and focus on what really matters. Look for products that carry EPDs or third-party LCA-based eco labels, which together are leading the way to a more transparent future and providing greater confidence in sustainable procurement practices. **FM**



Explaining The Global GreenTag™ Product Scorecard & Tags

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