
Options for Communicating Environmental Information on Products

Project

Duration

Sep 2011 - Feb 2012

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Information on the environmental characteristics of products, such as on the amount of greenhouse gas emissions caused during their production or their energy efficiency, are essential in order to allow consumers to make informed choices about which products to buy. This project investigated different design options for product-related environmental information addressed at consumers. Ecologic Institute contributed, in particular, an analysis of the World Trade Organization's (WTO) requirements for legal rules on environmental labels. The study is available for download.

The project was carried out against the background of the 2012 of the EU Sustainable Consumption and Production Industrial Policy (SCP/SIP) Action Plan. Providing consumers with comprehensive information on the environmental performance of products is a possible initiative in this context. The aim of this study was to examine different mechanisms and vehicles for communicating product-level environmental information to consumers. The study investigates which type of information consumers will most easily and understand. Different labels were developed and tested with the help of individuals and groups from different countries and specific designs suggested.

However, labeling rules are subject to certain legal rules at the international level, notably to the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT) and the Agreement on Technical Barriers to Trade (BTB), both part of the WTO legal order. Christiane Gerstetter, Nils Meyer-Ohlendorf and Malte Preuss of the Ecologic Legal Team have analysed these rules, taking account of recent WTO case law on environmental labels. They conclude that such rules are, in principle, admissible under WTO law, but subject to certain conditions. For example, imported products must not be treated worse as compared to domestic products.Â

The [study](#) [pdf, 1.8 MB, English] as well as the [annex](#) [pdf, 2.4 MB, English] are available for download.

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