

Good Environmental Choice Australia Ltd
Managers of the Australian Ecolabel Program

FINAL STANDARD: GECA 28-2005
Issued: 29 November 2006
Validity: 3 years

The Australian Ecolabel Program

Australian Voluntary Environmental Labelling Standard

Furniture and Fittings



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Use of This Standard

This voluntary environmental labelling standard may be used by competent environmental assessors to establish product compliance to the Australian Ecolabel Program. Products that are certified with the mark of conformity, the “Environmental Choice Label” have been independently tested and demonstrate compliance to the environmental and social performance criteria detailed in this standard. The overall goal of environmental labels and declarations is, through communication of verifiable and accurate information that is not misleading, on environmental aspects of products and services, to encourage the demand for and supply of those products and services that cause less stress on the environment, thereby stimulating the potential for market-driven continuous environmental improvement.

This standard identifies environmental, quality, regulatory and social performance criteria that products sold on the Australian market can meet in order to be considered as best “environment practice”. Products that have been certified as complying to this standard may gain greater market recognition and a marketing advantage in government and business procurement programs and broad consumer environmental preference.

This standard can be used by Australian producers to guide their design for environment programs by using the environmental criteria as key performance benchmarks that reduce the environmental loads of their product. The standard is necessarily restricted in its identification of environmental loads from the product life cycle. Producers should consider other environmental improvement along the product cycle not included in this standard for their design for environment programs and aim for even higher levels of environmental performance where technically possible.

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Printed in Australia

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Voluntary Environmental Labelling Standard

Furniture and Fittings

Abstract

This Standard specifies environmental performance requirements of home and office furniture and fittings for the Australian Ecolabel Program. This standard does not include recreational outdoor furniture. The Australian Ecolabel Program generally complies to ISO 14024: "Environmental labels and declarations - Guiding principles" which requires environmental labelling specifications to include criteria that are objective, reasonable and verifiable.

Current Status: FINAL STANDARD Version 1.2

Date Published: 29 November 2006

Total Pages: 14

Definitions:

"Label" means the Environmental Choice Australia Label.

"Recycled Content" includes:

Post-Consumer: Material generated by households, or by commercial, industrial and institutional facilities in their role as end-users of the product, which can no longer be used for its intended purpose. This includes returns of material from the distribution chain.

Pre-Consumer: Material diverted from the waste stream during a manufacturing process. Excluded is re-utilisation of materials such as rework, regrind or scrap generated in a process and capable of being reclaimed within the same process that generated it.

Alloy: A combination of two or more elements, one of which is a metal. This includes binary, tertiary and quaternary alloys (two, three and four elements, respectively). The result is a metallic substance with properties different from those of its components.

Particle Boards: Boards made from wood fragments (chips or shavings) which are formed and pressed into sheet form and bonded together with resin.

Fibre Boards: Boards composed of plant fibres, such as timbers or chaffs. According to the density, they are categorized 'into insulation boards (IB)', 'medium density fibre boards (MDF)' and 'hard boards (HB)'.

Edge Glued Panels: Glued processed timbers, such as small lumbered wood or wood layers, that are formed and pressed into sheet form in the direction of fibre, paralleled each other and bonded with resin. These panels are often known as veneer panels.

Waste Wood: Residual products generated by thinning out timbers, cutting out branches and processing timber and to withdrawn timbers after use, excluding withered or dead trees.

Veneer Panels: *See Edge-Glued Panels.*

Used Timber / Wood: Also known as salvaged and/or reclaimed timbers or wood. Includes materials sourced from old (pre-loved) furniture, demolitions, and other relevant sources.

STEL (Exposure Standard - Short Term Exposure Limit): A 15 minute TWA exposure which should not be exceeded at any time during a working day even if the eight-hour TWA average is within the TWA exposure standard. Exposures at the STEL should not be longer than 15 minutes and should not be repeated more than four times per day. There should be at least 60 minutes between successive exposures at the STEL (National Occupational Health and Safety Commission (NOHSC)).

Organic Tin Catalysts: Organic Tin Catalysts are a prime essential ingredient in the production of flexible polyurethane foam in Australia. The Tin catalyst gives the Polyurethane foam its flexible characteristics including shape memory, density. The main Organic Tin Catalysts that are used in the production of Polyurethane are;

- Dibutyl Dilaurate – DBTDL $(C_4H_9)_2Sn(OOC(CH_2)_{10}CH_3)_2/C_{32}H_{64}O_4Sn$
- Stannous Octoate - Tin 2-Ethylhexanoate $[CH_3(CH_2)_3CH(C_2H_5)COO]_2Sn$

The impact of both of these catalysts occurs in a residual form during the production stage, i.e. it is left as a residue in machines used in the production of PU flexible foam.

Timber / Wood: Includes wood sourced from raw (virgin) forest timbers, timbers sourced from sustainable forestry, or waste wood materials including particle boards, fibre boards and edge-glued panels. Also includes used timber/wood.

TWA (Exposure Standard - Time-Weighted Average): The average airborne concentration of a particular substance when calculated over a normal eight-hour working day, for a five-day working week (National Occupational Health and Safety Commission (NOHSC)).

1.0 Introduction to the Environmental Benefits of Recycled Content & Environmentally Preferable Furniture and Fitting Products

This Standard seeks to define good environmental performance benchmarks for home and office furniture and fittings. The voluntary environmental labelling standard implemented by the Australian Environmental Labelling Association (GECA) specifies environmental performance criteria for home and office furniture including chairs, sofas, couches, recliners, stools, computer chairs, tables, coffee tables, computer desks, desks, office desks and variations thereof including fittings. Home/office furniture and fitting products form a significant proportion of items manufactured for use within residential, commercial and government environments and form a major manufacturing sector in Australia. This standard stipulates the environmental load of home/office furniture and fitting products throughout their entire life cycle.

Home/office furniture and fitting products pose a significant environmental burden during their manufacture, use and disposal. These environmental impacts include but are not limited to the raw materials used for their manufacture, coatings (paints, lacquers, and varnishes), textiles, adhesives, joinery, hazardous treatments, energy and water use during production and their disposal, among others. Developments in timber, alloy and metal (steel, aluminium) and plastic recycling have encouraged innovation in furniture and fitting design and manufacture,

encouraging the production of products that both readily incorporate recycled materials, and those with constituents that can be recycled into new products at end of life. These products often equal and surpass traditional products in all aspects of strength, durability and consumer expectation.

The primary purpose of this standard is to define environmental performance criteria for a broad range of home/office furniture and fitting products. Home/office furniture and fitting products made from recycled materials or those sourced from sustainable resources are environmentally preferable because they reduce the demand for virgin timber, raw steel/aluminium/alloy materials and virgin plastics and when recycled, reduce the amount of waste going to landfill. The standard refers to the manufacture of the products and their constituent materials, the period of actual use and disposal, and packaging materials used for their transport.

This standard specifies requirements for the finishing restrictions of certain treatment or coatings that would restrict further recycling and the provision of plastic type information to allow for further post-consumer recycling.

2.0 Product Category Scope

This standard is applicable to the following categories of final ready-to-use home and office furniture products:

- 2.1 **Office Chairs:** Commercial indoor contract chairs and seats including computer chairs, stools, school chairs, footrests and variations thereof;
- 2.2 **Office Desks & Tables:** Commercial indoor desks and tables including computer desks, boardroom tables, office coffee tables, free-standing cabinets and shelving units, coat-racks, and variations thereof;
- 2.3 **Domestic Chairs:** Recreational Indoor chairs and seats including computer chairs, collapsible / foldable chairs, stools, recliners, couches, sofas, footrests and variations thereof.
This excludes mattresses;
- 2.4 **Domestic Desks & Tables:** Indoor recreational desks and tables including kitchen tables, coffee tables, computer desks, dining tables, bedside tables, free-standing wardrobes, lamp-tables, free-standing cabinets and shelving units, and variations thereof;
- 2.5 **Bedroom Furniture:** Indoor bedroom furniture including bed-frames, free-standing wardrobes, bedside-tables and variations thereof, excluding bedding and mattresses.
- 2.6 **White Furniture:** Furniture pending finishing (e.g. upholstering) to allow different client requirements.
- 2.7 **Fittings:** Partitions, window fittings, shelving, and wall furniture.
- 2.8 **Ceilings :** Ceiling linings and ceiling panel products.

NOTE – This standard excludes recreational outdoor furniture.

3.0 Environmental Performance Criteria

3.1 Fitness for Purpose

Certified products should be good performers in their intended application. It is implied that certain standards of product performance are implicit in the label. The manufacturer of the product must ensure that the product is fit for its intended purpose and where relevant:

- 3.1.1 The product meets the performance requirements of the relevant Australian Standard for its intended application; or the product meets any other internationally accepted standard if it is to be exported;

Relevant Australian Furniture Standards include but are not limited to:

AS/NZS 4442:1997 Office Desks

AS/NZS 4443:1997 Office panel systems – workstations

AS/NZS 4438:1997 Height adjustable swivel chairs

AS/NZS 4688:2000 Fixed height chairs

AS 5079:2003 Filing cabinets

-- *OR* --

- 3.1.2 The product can demonstrate sufficient quality by providing testing reports from an independent organisation or case studies from installations demonstrating market suitability and quality.

--*AND*--

- 3.1.3 The manufacturer shall offer a commercial guarantee of five years on the quality of the product provided the product is used according to its intended use. The guarantee shall be valid from the date of delivery to the consumer.

3.2 Material Selection Requirements:

The following requirements are for each type of material contained in the furniture of fitting with a minimum weight of 10% of the overall product. The exception is the timber sources criteria 3.2.1.1.- Contraversial timber sources, which must be assessed for all timber inputs and the fabrics criteria 3.2.4.

3.2.1 Timber and Other Natural Materials

3.2.1.1 Controversial Sources

Wood and other natural materials from sources that are not certified under a recognised certification scheme (e.g. FSC or AFS) as being sustainably managed shall not originate from:

Illegal harvesting

Illegally harvested wood and natural materials are those that are harvested traded or transported in a

way that is in breach with applicable national regulations (such regulations can for example address CITES species, money laundering, corruption and bribery, and other relevant national regulations).

Genetically modified organisms

Wood and natural materials from genetically modified organisms are those which have been induced by various means to consist of genetic structural changes (for a definition of genetically modified, please refer to Directive 2001/18/EC on the deliberate release of genetically modified organisms in the environment). Please note that this does not exclude traditional breeding programs, since these are not considered to be part of the techniques of genetic modification.

Uncertified high conservation value communities

High Conservation Value communities are those that possess one or more of the following attributes:

- a) Communities containing globally, regionally or nationally significant concentrations of biodiversity values (e.g. endemism, endangered species, refugia); and/or large landscape level communities, contained within, or containing the management unit, where viable populations of most if not all naturally occurring species exist in natural patterns of distribution and abundance;
- b) Communities that are in[constitute] or contain rare, threatened or endangered ecosystems;
- c) Communities fundamental to meeting basic needs of locally indigenous human populations (e.g. subsistence, health) and/or critical to these people's traditional cultural identity (areas of cultural, ecological, economic or religious significance identified in cooperation with such local communities).

For materials sourced from within Australia, please refer to the EPBC Act List of Threatened Fauna at <http://www.deh.gov.au/cgi-bin/sprat/public/publicthreatenedlist.pl?wanted=fauna> and the EPBC Act List of Threatened Flora at <http://www.deh.gov.au/cgi-bin/sprat/public/publicthreatenedlist.pl?wanted=flora> for listings of threatened species, the EPBC Act List of Threatened Ecological Communities at <http://www.deh.gov.au/cgi-bin/sprat/public/publiclookupcommunities.pl> for listings of threatened communities and the Australian Heritage Data Base at <http://www.deh.gov.au/cgi-bin/ahdb/search.pl> for listings of areas of cultural significance. For materials sourced from outside Australia, please refer to credible lists detailing threatened species, threatened communities and areas of cultural significance in the respective countries.

3.2.1.2 Treatment

Wood and natural materials used in furniture and fittings products may not be treated with fungicides and insecticides that are classified due to their hazardous nature by the IARC as Type 1a and Type 1b as hazardous for storage and/or transportation.

Refer: <http://www.who.int/whopes/recommendations/en/>

3.2.1.3 Air Emissions

Products made from wood and other natural products that contain formaldehyde based additives, shall be subject to the following air emission limits for formaldehyde as measured using the Air Chamber, Desiccator or Perforator test methods. Raw timber and natural materials is exempt from this criterion.

Desiccator Test Requirements: 1mg/l

For individual components such as particleboard or MDF panels or other panel or surface covering products such as veneers and laminates the panels shall be tested using the Desiccator method in Australian Standard - AS 1859 : Part 1 Particleboard /Part 2 MDF and shall demonstrate level below 1mg/litre.

Other Internationally accepted Testing Requirements:

Table 1: Limit values of formaldehyde emissions allowed from certified furniture or fittings product and components made from wood and/or natural materials only.

TWA			STEL		
ppm	mg/m ³	mg/l	ppm	mg/m ³	mg/l
0.15	0.18	0.15	0.3	0.36	0.3

Compliance to this criterion can be demonstrated in one of two ways: either by testing the overall emissions of the final product using as measured using either the Air Chamber, Desiccator or Perforator test methods, or by testing the emissions of each component material and calculating the total emissions of the final product based on quantities of individual components in the respective product. If the latter option is selected, testing should be conducted based on methods outlined in ASTM-D51-16: Small Scale Environment Chamber determination of organic emissions from indoor materials/products is recommended.

Glues in Plywood and Laminated Wood:

The content of free formaldehyde in glues for plywood or laminated wood or other natural material panels or products may be up to 0.5% w/w.

3.2.1.4 Salvaged & Reclaimed Timbers

Salvaged or reclaimed timbers may be used in certified furniture and fittings. Salvaged and reclaimed timbers include timbers legally sourced as pre-cut waste timber or deadwood from cityscape, urban and rural gardens, demolition sites, and waste wood from certified tree loppers / doctors.

Salvaged and reclaimed timbers must be certified by the EU Flower label or the Nordic Swan label or, once released, the Good Environmental Choice Label, or satisfy the requirements of the GECA Standard No – : Salvaged and Reclaimed Timbers.

3.2.2 Plastics

3.2.2.1 Resin Identification Codes

To be licensed to carry the Label, appropriate plastics resin identification code promulgated by the Plastics and Chemical Industry Association must be marked on each individual recycled plastic products or components weighing greater than 100g.

Exemptions may be made for products where the nature of the manufacturing process or the size and shape of the product restrict the application of the plastics resin identification code on the product. Exempt products will ensure that appropriate and acceptable information describing disposal methods for the product including the relevant plastic resin identification code will be provided at the time of sale of the product to encourage further recycling.

3.2.3 Padding material

3.2.3.1 Synthetic latex and natural latex requirements

Latex containing 1.3 butadiene shall be at levels \leq 1mg/kg latex.

The total amount of discharges (measured as COD or TOC) from the production of foam rubber shall be treated and decreased by 90% in on-site or external sewage treatment works prior to emissions into waterways.

3.2.3.2 Polyurethane padding requirements

3.2.3.2.1 Additives

1. CFC, HCFC, HFC or Methylene Chloride shall not be used as blowing agents.
2. Analine based amines, and pigments and catalysis based on mercury, lead, cadmium, and chromium must not be added to the padding material.
3. Where Organic Tin Catalysts are used in the production of flexible polyurethane, the manufacturer must have in place a contract with a licensed or registered hazardous waste disposal company who is responsible for the correct disposal of the hazardous waste.

3.2.4 Fabrics

All fabric must be certified by the Good Environmental Choice Label, the EU Flower label or the Nordic Swan label or satisfy the requirements of the GECA Standard No - 19: Textiles, except fabric used in the construction of " white furniture" awaiting upholstery as defined in section 2.6.

3.2.5 Glass

Lead glazing, crystal glass, mirror glass, wire reinforced glass and/or laminated glass must not be used in the furniture or fittings.

3.2.6 Adhesives

Adhesives must be certified by the Good Environmental Choice Label, the EU Flower label the New Zealand Environmental Choice Label or the Nordic Swan label or satisfy the requirements of the GECA Standard No – 1: Adhesives.

3.3 Hazardous Materials

3.3.1 Overall Loads

In order to promote the reduction of pollutant hazards in the disposal, landfill and/or incineration of end of life furniture, the following substances shall not be added to eco-labeled furniture during the production process:

Arsenic
Cadmium
Chromium
Copper
Lead
Mercury
Fluorine
Chlorine
Pentachlorophenol (PCP)
Tar oils (benzo(a)pyrene)

3.3.2 Formaldehyde Emissions

Furniture that contains formaldehyde based additives or products containing formaldehyde additives, shall be subject to the following air emission limits for formaldehyde. Furniture or fittings produced from only raw timber or natural materials are exempt from this criterion.

Table 2: Limit values of overall formaldehyde emissions allowed from final certified furniture or fittings products.

TWA			STEL		
Ppm	mg/m ³	mg/l	Ppm	mg/m ³	mg/l
0.3	0.36	0.3	0.6	0.72	0.6

The content of free formaldehyde in glues for plywood or laminated wood or other natural materials panels or products may be up to 0.5% w/w.

Compliance to this criterion can be demonstrated in one of two ways: either by testing the overall emissions of the final product using as measured using either the Air Chamber, Desiccator or Perforator test methods, or by testing the emissions of each component material and calculating the total emissions of the final product based on quantities of individual components in the respective product. If the latter option is selected, testing should be conducted based on methods outlined in ASTM-D51-16: Small Scale Environment Chamber determination of organic emissions from indoor materials/products is recommended.

3.3.3 Chemical Additives

Furniture or fittings shall not contain carcinogenic substances in categories 1, 2A as classed by the International Agency for Research on Cancer – <http://www.iarc.fr>.

3.3.4 Prohibited Substances

Halogenated organic binding agents, polybrominateddiphenylether (PBDE) flame retardants, analine based amines, phalates, aziridine or polyaziridines as well as pigments and additives that contain lead, tin, cadmium VI, mercury or their compounds shall not:

- a) be added to individual furniture or fittings parts,
- b) used in the manufacture of timber furniture and fittings, or
- c) used in the manufacture of preparatory agents or agents for the degreasing or surface treatments of furniture and fittings or their components.

The coating of metal gas lifts is exempt from this criterion. In exceptional cases, surfaces may be treated with chromium or nickel where this is necessary on the grounds of heavy physical wear or in the case of parts that require particularly tight connections. This exemption does not include parts that are intended to come into frequent contact with skin.

3.4 Post Consumption Recycling, Coatings, Labels and other Treatment.

3.4.1 Separability

The eco-labeled product shall be easily disassembled making possible the recovery and recycling of materials used.

In order to facilitate recycling of the materials used in products, the following materials have to be easily separated:

- Aluminium, if it composes $\geq 5\%$ by weight of the eco-labelled product;
- Steel, if it composes $\geq 10\%$ by weight of the eco-labelled product;
- Glass, if it composes $\geq 10\%$ by weight of the eco-labelled product;
- Plastic, if it composes $\geq 20\%$ by weight of the eco-labelled product.

3.4.2 Product Custodianship

The applicant shall accept their product without additional cost (not including transportation costs) for further recycling, or have arrangements with an Australian plastics or steel recycler to accept the product, or have an established product stewardship program..

3.4.3 Coatings/Treatments

Furniture and fittings products (or components) must not be impregnated, labelled, coated or otherwise treated in a manner which would prevent post consumer recycling. Exemption may be made for products with a long product life where a coating or treatment would further extend the useful life of the product.

3.5 Replacement Parts

For those parts of a product which are subject to wear, e.g. hinges, locks, table leaves, functionally compatible replacements shall be guaranteed for a period of at least five years.

3.6 Recycled furniture

Recycled furniture can be licensed in conformation to this standard providing that the furniture has not been refinished or coated with any materials except for the purpose of cleaning.

4.0 Compliance to Environmental Regulations

The applicant is required to comply with relevant environmental legislation and government orders at the Local, State and Commonwealth level, if these have been issued. An applicant's compliance with this criteria may be established by undertaking a series of random checks and gathering samples of applicant operational procedures and documents by approved assessors as evidence to support compliance during the verification and /or a statement of self declaration by an executive officer of the applicant organisation. Where an applicant is from an overseas jurisdiction, that jurisdictions environmental regulations apply.

5.0 Compliance to Labour, Anti-Discrimination and Safety Regulations

An applicant shall demonstrate that all employees are covered by a Federal or State award or a certified industrial agreement or a registered workplace agreement as determined by the Industrial Relations Commission, the Employment Advocate or a State or Territory Workplace Relations Agency. An applicant shall demonstrate general compliance to the terms of State or Territory Legislation concerning Occupational, Health and Safety and/or the *Commonwealth Safety, Rehabilitation and Compensation Act 1988* where applicable. Where the applicant is subject to a breach order by a government agency or a guilty verdict by an Australian Court within the last 24 months on the basis of a breach of State, Territory or Commonwealth Occupational, Health and Safety Legislation there must be evidence of corrective action.

The applicant shall demonstrate general compliance to the requirements of the *Racial Discrimination Act 1975*, *Sex Discrimination Act 1984*, *Disability Discrimination Act 1992*, *Equal Opportunity for Women in the Workplace Act 1999* and complementary State Legislation. Applicants cannot be in the list of 'named' or non-compliant employers under the *Equal Opportunity for Women in the Workplace Act 1999*. Where the applicant is subject to a breach order by a government agency or a guilty verdict by an Australian Court in the last 24 months on the basis of a breach of these Acts there must be evidence of corrective action.

Where an applicant is from an overseas jurisdiction, the applicant shall demonstrate general compliance to that jurisdictions anti-discrimination, occupational health and safety and workers compensations regulations. Where the applicant is subject to a breach order by a government agency or a guilty verdict by a legal court in their respective country within the last 24 months on the basis of a the breach of anti-discrimination, occupational health and safety and workers compensations regulations there must be evidence of corrective action.

An applicant's compliance with these criteria may be established by undertaking a series of random

checks and gathering samples of applicant operational procedures and documents by approved assessors as evidence to support compliance during the verification and/or a statement of self declaration by an executive officer of the applicant organisation.

6.0 Compliance Testing

Conformance with this standard shall be demonstrated by undertaking an assessment to the above criteria by an approved assessor following the certification and verification procedures detailed in the Good Environmental Choice Australia Ltd Documented Quality Management System which generally follows the environmental auditing requirements of ISO 14 011 and 14 012.

The Australian Ecolabel Program classifies approved assessors as:

1. Assessors registered by Good Environmental Choice Australia as environmental professionals that hold expertise relevant for an assessment and which have undertaken training in the procedures of the Australian Ecolabel Program, or
2. Environmental auditors accredited with the RABQSA ; or
3. Assessors registered with the Environmental Choice New Zealand Trust.

New testing shall be undertaken by a laboratory accredited by the National Association of Testing Authorities (NATA) or similar overseas accreditation to carry out the relevant tests and/or documentation detailing environmental performance against the key indicators for this standard. The tests results should be presented on NATA endorsed reports or from a laboratory acceptable to Good Environmental Choice Australia Ltd

Audit evidence should be of such a quality and quantity that competent environmental auditors working independently of each other will reach similar audit findings from evaluation of the same audit evidence against the same audit criteria

Suitable sources of information to establish compliance may be but are not limited to:

- 1) Technical specification of the product.
- 2) Obvious characteristics of the product from examination.
- 3) Scientific and test results and reports.
- 4) Environmental management system and audit reports and results.
- 5) Life cycle assessment of each stage of the product life cycle via a physical audit and examination.
- 6) Life cycle assessment via scientific testing.
- 7) A statement of confirmation by an executive officer.
- 8) An assessment of company or government records.
- 9) Other material that can be considered objective evidence.

If testing results or environmental auditing results are not available, and/or there is not sufficient data to establish full compliance to the criteria required by this standard then certification cannot be awarded.