

## The Global Ecolabelling Network (GEN) and TCO Development



TCO Development has been a member of the Global Ecolabelling Network (GEN) since 2001. TCO participates in annual meetings with GEN members and abides by a general code of conduct for ecolabelling organisations. As a proud GEN member, and in recognition of the increasing importance of organisations like GEN, we put together some background information to help TCO visitors understand more about GEN.

### What is GEN?

The GEN was founded and launched in 1995 to improve, promote, and develop ecolabelling products and services. GEN is a non-profit association of environmental performance labelling programs. These organizations are all classified as Type I ecolabelling programs by the International Standards Organization (ISO), indicating that they are third party and that they address multiple criteria.

The main purpose of GEN is to bring together ecolabelling practitioners from around the world to share (i.e. compare and contrast) their knowledge, experiences, ambitions and operational strategies and processes.

### Who is GEN?

GEN currently has 26 members, including Brazil, Canada, India, New Zealand, Russia, Sweden, and Thailand, to name just a few. GEN has a General Affairs Office in Tokyo, Japan and Secretariat in Ottawa, Canada. China is the newest GEN member, having been accepted to the organisation at the annual general meeting in Ottawa this year. See the complete member list and learn more about GEN at [www.globalecolabelling.net](http://www.globalecolabelling.net).

### What does GEN do?

GEN provides a valuable means to work co-operatively to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of ecolabelling both domestically and in other countries. GEN also facilitates the development of mutual recognition protocols between labelling programs and the harmonization of labelling criteria for products and services.

At the same time, GEN has evolved from a simple information exchange/dissemination organization to a key stimulator and facilitator for cooperation and collaboration among ecolabelling practitioners as well as between ecolabellers and major international bodies and organizations such as ISO and IEC, the United Nations, WTO, the World Bank and its regional counterparts, IGPN, ISEAL Alliance, and others.

The market has recently experienced a flood of other environmental performance certification, labelling and recognition schemes and initiatives (e.g. self declarations and

claims, etc.) that are causing consumer confusion and uncertainty (and even some general mistrust). Given these circumstances, it is important and timely that the GEN and its members are taking steps to differentiate, distinguish and strongly promote [GEN] ecolabels. GEN members need to communicate the importance of Type I eco-labels to the market and to ensure the integrity of labels (and ultimately environmental improvement) through 3rd party certification.

### **The 2008 GEN Annual General Meeting**

Every year, members meet for the GEN Annual General Meeting (AGM) which is hosted by one of the members in their respective country. This past October, the GEN AGM was hosted in Canada.

The AGM is preceded by a one to two day conference which is attended by GEN members, non-members, and representatives from industry, government, and environmental groups that are interested in promoting environmental labelling as part of broader initiatives toward sustainable production and consumption.

This year, the conference titled “The Evolving Role of Ecolabelling as a Policy and Marketing Tool” was held on September 30 in Ottawa, Canada. The sessions focused on ecolabelling as a policy tool, with examples from different countries, and case studies from industry that use ecolabelling as a marketing tool. Presentations highlighted how eco-labels can be used to influence consumer behaviour, government policy, and international trade. There was a strong emphasis on the need for multi-stakeholder involvement and that eco-labels are not a stand alone tool but must be supported by strong government regulation, industry take-up and consumer understanding.

The next GEN AGM will be held in Japan in October 2009.

### **New Developments in GEN**

There seems to be an explosion of ecolabels in the past year and GEN in particular encourages co-ordination between diverse labels. Competition will confuse the market whereas co-operation can enhance the effect of all labels. GEN would like to see its members engage more in mutual recognition in the form of GENICES.

Given these current circumstances and complications, the GEN Board of Directors has recently started work on a common position and global public relations campaign aimed at raising the profile of credible ecolabels, including:

- boosting recognition and understanding of ecolabels by the public and key stakeholders
- challenging the authenticity and relevance of “pretender labels”
- promoting the use of credible ecolabels as an important indicator of environmental sustainability and performance
- highlighting the existence of the GEN and ISO 14024 requirements as indicators of credibility, and
- providing tools to help GEN officials obtain funding to support ongoing public relations efforts.

## **TCO and GEN**

In addition to attending regular GEN meetings, TCO representatives have given numerous presentations at the GEN AGMs over the years. TCO has a wealth of information and experience to share with GEN members concerning the labelling of IT equipment and operating an international label for international products.

TCO is working on co-operation possibilities with other national ecolabelling programmes to co-ordinate common product categories. This will make it easier for manufacturers to certify IT products under one globally recognised label.

TCO will be hosting the GEN Board of Directors meeting at the TCO Vienna office in April 2009.