



# The most commonly-asked questions about the Nordic Ecolabel

## 1. How did it originate?

The Nordic Ecolabel was established in 1989 by the Nordic Council of Ministers, and is locally implemented by the governments of Sweden, Norway, Iceland, Denmark and Finland. It is the official ecolabel in the Nordic countries. Today it is the world's leading ecolabel with over 1000 licenses just in Sweden alone, for a total of 66 product areas. In Sweden the company SIS Ecolabelling has responsibility for criteria development, control visits, licensing and marketing. It controls the products and services as an independent third-party control organ. It is owned by the Swedish Standards Council and the Swedish government.

## 2. What is the purpose of the Nordic Ecolabel?

Unfortunately we do not live in a sustainable society. We consume too many things, we do not recycle, and we do not use enough renewable energy. Our vision is

a sustainable society where future generations will have the same opportunities as we have today. To achieve this goal, our mission is to contribute to a sustainable consumerism.

The Nordic Ecolabel, commonly known in the Nordic countries as "the Swan" because of its symbol, is a practical tool to help companies make products that are more sustainable. Therefore it is important that more people buy Nordic Ecolabelled products and companies sell more Nordic Ecolabelled products and services.

## 3. How is it financed?

SIS Ecolabelling receives funding from the government and through its licensing fees from companies, normally 0.3% of the annual turnover from the Nordic Ecolabelled product or service. Its financial resources are used for the development of new criteria, control of products and services, and marketing. SIS Ecolabelling is a non-profit company and has no branch affiliations.

#### **4. Who controls the Nordic Ecolabel?**

The Nordic Ecolabel is controlled in Sweden by the Swedish Ecolabelling Board consisting of members from the Swedish Environmental Protection Agency, the Swedish Grocers Federation, the Confederation of Swedish Enterprise, the Swedish Chemicals Agency, Friends of the Earth, The Swedish Association of Local Authorities and Regions, The Energy Agency and the Swedish Consumers' Association.

The Swedish Ecolabelling Board also has responsibility for the EU Flower and products that apply for the EU Flower ecolabel. The Board further reports to the Swedish government on EU Flower criteria, who in turn decide on Sweden's official position in EU Flower matters.

The Nordic Ecolabelling Board consists of members from each national Ecolabelling Board and decides on Nordic criteria requirements for products and services. Criteria are applicable in all Nordic countries, and no country can develop its own criteria or product groups. When a product is granted a Nordic Ecolabel in one Nordic country, the company can even apply, through a simple application procedure, for a Nordic Ecolabel in the other Nordic countries.

#### **5. How well-known is the Nordic Ecolabel?**

It is one of the most well-known with 97 % of Swedes both recognizing it and understanding what it stands for.

#### **6. What can be Nordic Ecolabelled?**

Today there are 66 product and service criteria. Thousands of products and services, from detergents to car tires to hotels and restaurants can apply for the Nordic Ecolabel.

#### **7. How are product criteria areas chosen?**

We choose to work in the areas where we believe we can make a difference, in other words, choosing areas where we can achieve the highest environmental impact gains. We choose product areas from three perspectives.

Relevance - is this an area with huge environmental problems? If it is, we look closer and investigate.

Potential for environmental improvements - if we create criteria for this group, will it make an environmental difference and impact? Are these products used by many people is also a consideration we make.

And lastly, can we steer the production of this product or the establishment of this service (for ex hotels, restaurants, car washes) so that by labelling this product we can achieve a better environmental production or establishment process?

A total lifecycle span analysis is used for all products and services.

Criteria are decided upon in an open process with experts from the business world, environmental organisations and authorities. Before the criteria are accepted by the Nordic Ecolabelling Board they are publicized for review and comments. The Nordic Ecolabelling Board makes the final decision on which Nordic criteria will be implemented in the Nordic countries.

### **8. What kind of analysis is made?**

We have criteria for the use of chemicals, the amounts of discharge to the air, water and ground that the product produces, as well as energy usage and waste procedures. We also investigate quality and functionality aspects of the product.

### **9. Does the same criteria always apply?**

No, we revise our criteria for the different product groups on an average of every 3-4 years. Products must fulfil the new criteria and companies must re-apply for a license.

### **10. How can a product or service be Ecolabelled?**

In order to receive a Nordic Ecolabel license the product or service must meet criteria requirements from one of the 66 product criteria areas, and for the specific product group. A company can apply for a



license and the application fee is 18 000 SEK. Applications can be found at [www.svanen.nu](http://www.svanen.nu).

Each company must provide, among other things, independent testing results and documentation for the specific product. A control visit will also be made. If approved, the product or service may carry the Nordic Ecolabel.

### **11. Are Nordic Ecolabelled products more expensive?**

At the start of an environmental production process costs may be higher than for equivalent production processes. The more Nordic Ecolabelled products that are sold on the market, the cheaper they will become. In some cases a Nordic Ecolabelled product can even be less expensive. Because of the criteria requirements, costs can even be reduced for raw materials, energy and waste production. A reduction in negative environmental impacts can make Nordic Ecolabelled products, from a societal perspective, cheaper than equivalent, non-Ecolabelled products.

## 12. Do these products have the same quality as non-Ecolabelled?

Yes, Nordic Ecolabelled products must be as good as equivalent products that do not carry the Nordic Ecolabel. Products must meet certain quality and functionality requirements. A detergent for example, must wash clothes clean at low temperatures, furniture must pass durability tests and toner cassettes must print at the highest quality.

## 13. What is the difference between the Nordic Ecolabel and the EU Flower?

The Nordic Ecolabel is the official ecolabel for the Nordic countries and the EU Flower is its EU equivalent. Both systems work in similar ways with a lifecycle span analysis and continually review criteria. They are often synchronized. The Nordic Ecolabel has 66 product areas and the EU Flower 25 area.

## 14. Why are there so many ecolabelling systems?

The Nordic Ecolabel is the only official Nordic Ecolabel. There are other sustainable development marking systems that also are controlled by third-part organs. These are KRAV, the EU Flower, the Falk (The Swedish Society for Nature Conservation) and Fair Trade. Together we make a strong force for changing society to be more sustainable. In Germany there is the Blue Angel and in Japan the Ecomark.

## Other well-known ecolabels who are trustworthy:



The EU-Flower.  
Official Ecolabel in the EU.



The Falk - logo for the Swedish Society for Nature Conservation



KRAV. Organic food  
Ecolabel in Sweden.



The Fair Trade logo. The Nordic Ecolabel encourage to choose Fair Trade products.



EU's label Organic Farming -  
which ecolabels groceries



# norden

Nordic Council of Ministers logo-  
designed by the artist Kyösti Varis.

## 15. Why does the Nordic Ecolabel have a swan as its trademark?

The swan figure originated in the Nordic Council of Ministers symbol which was a white Y on a blue background. The swan, with its four wings, represents Sweden, Norway, Finland and Iceland. Denmark joined in 1992 and has no wing in this symbol. The Nordic Ecolabel trademark was designed by the artist Kyösti Varis from Finland, who also made the Nordic Council of Ministers logotype.

## 16. How many people work at Nordic Ecolabelling companies?

The Nordic Ecolabel is the leading ecolabelling company in the world. The five Nordic Ecolabelling organisations have ca 80 employees, in Sweden there are 38 employees.





The Nordic Ecolabel logotype was also created by the artist Kyösti Varis.



[www.svanen.nu](http://www.svanen.nu)



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THE NORDIC ECOLABEL • 118 80 Stockholm  
Visiting address: S:t Paulsgatan 6  
Telefon: + 46 (8)-55 55 24 00  
info@ecolabel.se • www.ecolabel.se