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## Does the Electronics industry care about the environment?

Concerns about the environmental impact of electronic products have led to a variety of different legislative efforts and the proliferation of “eco-logos”, worldwide. The fragmentation, confusion and duplication of efforts significantly raises costs for all. Manufacturers of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) and Consumer Electronics (CE) products are addressing this problem proactively with standardization through Ecma International.

For decades, safeguarding the environment, keeping step with the “footprint” of industrial activity, has been high on the agenda of policy makers, industry and consumers alike. Concerns about product-environment symbiosis run from chemical, electromagnetic and acoustical emissions to recyclability and end-of-life management.

Worldwide, various legislative measures seek to reduce the environmental impact of products. For example restrictions of substances and chemicals as well as End of Life management are legislated in Europe and other countries and regions around the world have drafted similar legislation. Also, the European Commission has proposed a Directive related to Design for Environment. Environmental concerns are addressed also in a variety of “eco-labels” used throughout the world to signify the environmental friendliness of products. The maps below indicate the diversity of eco-labelling used in Europe and worldwide.



**Want all these on your product? Conflicting and overlapping eco-label requirements, with a fragmented world-wide legislative environment, increase complexity and costs, and provide little information on product environmental attributes.**



For a company building products for the global market, it is a complex task to ensure that in each country the appropriate eco-labels are awarded. Moreover, the labels themselves are binary indicators telling the consumer very little beyond the fact that it meets certain criteria. Manufacturers, and consumers, are increasingly confused by the growing variety of labels.

How can a manufacturer deal with this variety of recommendations and labels on a global market? Apply for all labels? The result might be a colourful product, bearing many labels, obscuring perhaps the company branding on the product.

It is also not viable to consider having only one label. This will be an oversimplistic approach for the whole range of diverse environmental issues.

Industry acutely feels the need to develop standards to aid the design of electronic products with reduced environmental impact. Having developed internal standards, and anticipating requirements for environmental conscious products for the global market, industry is developing international standards and technical reports.

Much of this work takes place in the international standardization group, Ecma International (Ecma). Ecma, created in 1961, is a not-for-profit international industry association. Experts work together in Ecma to complete standards, which are then often published and promulgated through relevant international standards bodies, e.g. ISO, IEC, CENELEC and ETSI.

In 1995, Ecma formed technical committee TC38 to develop recommendations on environmental attributes and the presentation thereof for ICT and CE products, and to monitor the development of environmental standards, regulations, conformity schemes and other requirements.

In 1999, Ecma released Technical Report TR/70 (Product-related environmental attributes), which identifies and describes environmental attributes and associated measurement methods related to ICT and CE products. These attributes include power consumption, emissions, and the public availability of data on materials and packaging.

TR/70 has more meaning than an eco-label, because it provides detailed information on a product's attributes as opposed to an indication of conformance to a “black box” of environmental tests. Customers can use this information when selecting products by balancing product performance, cost and environmental factors.

In December 2002, Ecma released standard ECMA-341 (Environmental design considerations for electronic products). This standard guides the design of commercially viable, environmentally sound products by specifying requirements and recommendations regarding areas such as energy and resource consumption, material content and selection, extendibility of product life and end of life management.

Ecma members active in this work include Alcatel, Apple, Canon, Hewlett Packard, Hitachi, IBM, Intel, Philips, Siemens and Sony. Thanks to these companies' commitment, and their having shared their knowledge through Ecma International, any manufacturer is now able to reduce the environmental impact of their products and to pass cost savings on to consumers.

For further information, and to download the mentioned Ecma publications free of charge please visit Ecma International on the web:

<http://www.ecma-international.org/>