



CERTIFICATION SYSTEMS: A Glossary

Shades of Green

There are three basic levels, or shades, of green:

- **First-Party Certifications** includes claims made directly by the responsible party.
- **Second-Party Certifications** are claims made by interested outside parties, such as trade organizations with a vested interest making the rules.
- **Third-Party Certifications** are claims made by organizations with no direct or indirect ties to any party, such as the U.S. Green Building Council (USGBC), GreenGuard, Green Label and Green Seal.

BIFMA is a second-party certification by a not-for-profit trade organization. BIFMA develops voluntary product and industry standards that support safe, healthy and sustainable environments. The certification system is validated and accepted by LEED; it does not analyze recycled content, toxicity, affects in landfill, or bio-based content.

Blue Angel (Blauer Engel) is a German certification for environmentally-friendly products and services, and was the first world-wide environmental label. The [Global Ecolabelling Network](#) (GEN), a non-profit group composed of [ecolabel](#) organizations throughout the world, was developed in response to this program.

Cradle to Cradle (C2C) seeks to create production techniques that are not just efficient but are essentially waste free. In cradle-to-cradle production, all material inputs and outputs are seen either as technical or biological nutrients. Technical nutrients can be recycled or reused with no loss of quality and biological nutrients composted or consumed. By contrast, [cradle to grave](#) refers to a company taking responsibility for the disposal of goods it has produced, but not necessarily putting products' constituent components back into service.

Environmental Choice EcoLogo is Environment Canada's eco-labeling program that identifies over 300 categories of products that are less harmful to the environment. It takes into account the manufacturing process, finished product, the environment and the health and safety of employees. The Eco-Logo symbol of certification is a green colored [maple leaf](#) intertwined within three doves, and provides customers with assurance that the products and services bearing the logo meet stringent environmental standards that have been verified by a third-party auditor.



Forest Stewardship Council (FSC) is an international non-profit organization that supports environmentally appropriate, socially beneficial and economically viable management of the world's forests. FSC tracks the chain of custody (CoC) from "the forest to the consumer including all successive stages of processing, transformation, manufacturing and distribution."

Global Ecolabeling Network (GEN) is a non-profit interest group composed of 26 of the world's leading ecolabeling programs, including Germany's [Blue Angel certification](#) and Green Seal. The goal of the interest group is to further the exchange of information between national eco-label activities.

GreenGuard is an industry-independent, third-party testing program for indoor air quality (IAQ). Established by the GreenGuard Environmental Institute (GEI), it tests low-emitting interior products and building materials including furnishings, furniture and office equipment. GreenGuard certification helps builders, architects, interior designers, procurement professionals and consumers locate, specify and purchase off-the-shelf, low-emitting products for indoor environments. More than 80 manufacturers across industries offer GreenGuard Indoor Air Quality Certified Products. GreenGuard is validated and accepted by LEED. The certification system is not intended to analyze recycled content, toxicity, bio-based content or any effects of degradation in landfills.

Green Label and Green Label Plus is a certification label by the Carpet and Rug Institute (CRI) and is awarded to carpets, carpet backings, and carpet adhesives that give off very low emissions of volatile organic compounds (VOCs). To meet LEED criteria, the floor covering must have the Green Label/Green Label Plus tag.

Green Seal is a non-profit, third-party certification that includes carpet, luminaries, office furniture, particle board, MDF, and wood finishes and sealants. It provides independent, objective, science-based guidance to the marketplace and to consumers. Green Seal takes a [life cycle assessment](#) (LCA) approach, evaluating a product from the raw materials through the manufacturing process and ending with recycling or disposal. The Green Seal means that the product has passed the tests; that it works as well as or better than others in its class, and that it has been evaluated without bias or conflict of interest.

ISO 14001 is an internationally accepted standard for an environmental management system (EMS), which encompasses front/back office, environmental compliance/waste diversion, elimination of toxins, health and safety, and life cycle analysis (LCA).

LEED (Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design) Green Building Rating System is a voluntary, consensus-based national standard for developing high-performance, sustainable buildings. LEED provides a complete framework for assessing building performance and meeting sustainability goals. LEED emphasizes state-of-the-art strategies for sustainable site development, water savings, energy efficiency, materials selection and indoor environmental quality.



Life Cycle Assessment (LCA) is the investigation and valuation of the environmental impacts of a given product or service caused or necessitated by its existence. The term “life cycle” refers to the notion that a fair, holistic assessment requires the evaluation of raw material production, manufacture, distribution, use and disposal. The sum of all those steps, or phases, is the life cycle of the product.

Scientific Certification Systems (SCS) is a third-party provider of certification, auditing, and testing services and standards. SCS certifies a range of products including office furniture systems, components, and seating, building materials, carpet and rug, hard surface flooring, paints, finishes, wood products and cleaning products.

Sustainable Forestry Initiative (SFI) is an independent program that is based on the premise that responsible environmental behavior and sound business decisions can co-exist. SFI offers two on-product label types: (1) Percent Certified Content Labels (CoC) and (2) Fiber Sourcing Labels.

SCS Indoor Advantage Certification is the most stringent of accepted third-party compliance standards for testing indoor air quality emissions. An important distinction between Indoor Advantage and GreenGuard is the use of health-based Chronic Reference Exposure Levels (CRELs) as thresholds rather than Total Volatile Organic Compounds (VOCs) and Threshold Limit Values (TLVs).