

Eco Labels, an Exciting Topic for SEPAWA® CONGRESS 2024

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As the Green Claims Directive is being discussed by the European Parliament [1] many wonder how the cosmetic industry will go about communicating eco claims and sustainability benefits of beauty products, once that will pass.

At present there are a variety of options, from traditional third party certifications such as COSMOS and NATRUE, to the new scoring systems, like the Green Impact Index and the Eco Beauty Score. On top of that the European Commission is proposing the EU Ecolabel system as the antidote to greenwashing [2].

This means we have a great variety of options and a disruptive regulation that will require validation behind eco claims. How do these options compare? How will they impact the way we develop and manufacture cosmetics? How will consumers and retailers respond and relate to them?

This is a time of transition so it is important to understand what the choices are and their implications. For this reason I thought it would be a great idea to have a round table discussion at the SEPAWA® CONGRESS about this very topic and have an interactive conversation with the key players and the audience from the industry.

The session will be on the 17th of October starting at 9 am. Each panellist will give a 15 minutes presentation to introduce their standard, ie COSMOS, Eco beauty Score, EU Ecolabel, Green Impact Index and NATRUE, followed by one hour round table.

To prepare for the round table discussion I give a summary of what each system is about.

COSMOS

The COSMOS standard is a third party certification scheme created by five European certification bodies. Key features include:

1. Promoting green chemistry and high renewable content (98%+)
2. Avoids threatened plant species and unethically sourced animal ingredients
3. Covers product formulas, storage, manufacturing, packaging, and labelling

4. Applies to finished products, raw materials, and manufacturing sites
5. Two certification types: COSMOS organic and COSMOS natural
6. Key numbers: nearly 35,000 certified beauty products, of which 26,648 organic, 12 certification bodies worldwide
7. No universal symbol; products display the certifying body's logo

NATRUE

Founded by German brands WALA, Weleda, Laverana, Primavera, Logocos, and CEP (Dalli Group) this third party certification has been a steady presence in the beauty industry. Key characteristics are

1. Similar to COSMOS: certifies manufacturers, ingredients, and products
2. Two certification levels: Organic cosmetics and Natural cosmetics
3. Key differences
 - No petrochemical-derived substances (except nature-identical preservatives and minerals)
 - Rejects reconstitution of organic dehydrated ingredients
4. Key numbers: 6,303 certified cosmetics and 3,345 raw materials, 133 certified manufacturers worldwide, 10 accredited certification bodies
5. Uses a recognizable NATRUE mark on certified products
6. Active in the industry with trade shows and presentations
7. A member of the European Commission's Cosmetics Working Group

EU Eco Label

Developed by the European Commission in 1992 for home care industry to reduce its environmental impact, it was extended to rinse-off beauty products and eventually expanded to all cosmetic products (Decision EU 2021/1870). Now it is

a far more comprehensive framework that applies to several goods and services. Key features are:

- To support the European Green Deal and circular economy;
 - Promoting credible and sustainable products;
 - Offering transparency via digital product passport
2. Criteria for cosmetic products:
 - Energy savings
 - Waste reduction (no secondary packaging, recyclable primary packaging)
 - Sustainably sourced, biodegradable, low toxicity ingredients
 - Restricted use of hazardous substances
 - Verified performance
 3. Certification process:
 - More complex and costly than COSMOS or NATRUE
 - Requires submitting tests and data to European ministry for verification
 4. Key numbers:
 - Over 95,000 products with Ecolabel mark
 - 1,750 are personal care products
 - 2,743 licenses
 - Constant growth of number of products, 8% growth in less than a year
 5. Potential: could become a significant player due to its official nature

Eco Beauty Score

The Eco Beauty Score Consortium was established in 2021, by major beauty players like L'Oréal, Unilever, Puig, Natura & Co, Amore Pacific, to develop a harmonized product scoring system based on multi-parametric impact assessment.

The Methodology is based on Product Environmental Footprint (PEF) via simplified Life Cycle Assessment (LCA) and a common database for environmental impacts of ingredients and packaging. At present there are no products on the market yet.

Green Impact Index

The Green Impact Index is the latest system joining the eco labels landscape. It was founded by the Pierre Fabre and at present it consists of 22 members with test products already on the market.

This system not only includes LCA criteria but also biodiversity and social parameters, providing a comprehensive assessment of several criteria part of the sustainability DNA.

The methodology has been validated by AFNOR (AFNOR Spec 2215) and it measures:

- over 50 criteria across packaging, biodiversity, formulas, manufacturing, transport, and consumer use
- Additional social criteria (fair trade, animal welfare, human rights)

The results are then used to calculate the final score which is given by 80% environmental and 20% social criteria.

This scoring system is pretty and easy to understand for consumers and it is already on the market with some test products.

Conclusions

The beauty industry is witnessing a significant shift towards sustainability, with various certification systems and scoring tools emerging to address environmental and social concerns. COSMOS, NATRUE, the European Ecolabel, the EcoBeauty Score Consortium, and the Green Impact Index each offer unique approaches to assessing and improving the sustainability of cosmetic products.

While each system has its strengths and limitations, they collectively contribute to pushing the industry towards more sustainable practices and greenwashing prevention.

The diversity of these approaches highlights the complexity of sustainability in cosmetics, encompassing aspects such as ingredient sourcing, packaging, LCAs, manufacturing processes, and social impact.

The beauty industry stands at a crucial juncture, with these sustainability tools playing a vital role in shaping its future direction towards more responsible and eco-friendly practices. Join me at the SEPAWA® CONGRESS to engage with the representatives of the key eco labels currently on the landscape and to navigate the future of your brand or company.

References:

- [1] <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/press/press-releases/2024/06/17/green-claims-directive-council-ready-to-start-talks-with-the-european-parliament/>
- [2] <https://www.euronews.com/green/2024/06/25/how-is-the-european-union-combating-greenwashing>

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