

Current Status of Measures against the Environmental Falsification Problems taken by the Eco Mark Office

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Eco Mark Office, Japan Environment Association

In Japan, there have occurred a number of environmental falsification problems in succession since January 2008, such as falsification of the percentage of waste paper pulp in recycled paper, inappropriate use of printing ink, and falsification of recycled plastic products, drawing public attention as a serious social problem. In order to cope with these problems, the Eco Mark Office has been making thorough inspection and correction of all similar types of certified products to ensure the credibility of green purchasing and material recycling, as described below.

1. Measures against the recycled paper falsification problem

In January 2008, there were reported that postcard papers which did not satisfy the contracted ratio of waste paper pulp had been supplied to Japan Post Holdings Co., Ltd. After then, some papermakers admitted that they had falsified the percentage of waste paper pulp contained in other recycled paper than postcards.

As there were also some Eco Mark certified paper products which did not satisfy the standards with respect to the waste paper pulp ratio in recycled paper, we have been making fact-finding survey and correction of 1,303 certified paper products.

< Measures against papermakers >

○ First step

- We requested 13 papermakers who sell Eco Mark certified products to make self-inspection for their 161 products, report its result and stop inappropriate use. In addition, we decided to withhold the posting on our website database of all certified products from 11 papermakers who made an announcement of falsification of their product.

○ Second step

- We successively sent our staff officials to make on-site inspection at paper factories which were reported to produce conformable products (at 12 factories of 7 companies). At the same time, we took product samples and sent them to the contracted laboratory for testing their waste paper pulp ratio.
- We have in turn posted on our website database again the products without any problem found on the factory inspection and test results. We have already posted a total of 43 products again.
- One of the causes of the problem was that some papermakers did not properly specify and manage the standards of waste paper pulp ratio in the product's specifications. The Japan Paper Association decided to implement preventive measures, under which member papermakers should show the figure of waste paper pulp ratio on their recycled paper products' package and allow clients to make on-site inspection at their factory to check with the Association's check list from July.

< Measures against manufacturers of stationery and other secondary paper products >

- Under a commission and on behalf of 405 secondary product producers who sell secondary and OEM paper products such as stationery/office supplies products, the Eco Mark Office surveyed related papermakers who supplied the secondary product producers with raw paper materials, to check their waste paper pulp ratio. We have already informed 136 secondary product producers of our investigation results. If any product does not satisfy our standards, we requested them to stop producing it or change its material specifications to satisfy our standards.
- The Eco Mark Office will continue this survey of secondary paper products until the end of April to ensure the compliance with our certification standards and the provision of appropriate environmental information.
- Regarding companies of secondary and OEM products, who make self-inspection instead of entrusting us to do it, if any product does not satisfy our standard, we also requested them to stop producing a nonconforming product, or change its material specifications to satisfy our standards.

2. Measures against inappropriate use of printing ink

In early February, we received reports from 2 printing ink manufacturers that they labeled and supplied their printing ink products which did not satisfy the standards of the Eco Mark and the American Soybean Association's "Soy Seal." We therefore made survey of 129 products from 23 certified printing ink manufacturers. As a result, we requested 7 ink manufacturers to take corrective actions against 18 nonconforming products, and made on-site inspection of their plants to verify their status of correction.

It became clear that the main cause of these inappropriate uses was because ink manufactures failed to check if the compound amount of petroleum base solvent exceeded the standard level, when they changed the specifications of some products (blending-type printing ink for special order) to improve their print adaptability. We therefore decided to require the companies to specify our certification standards in the product's specifications, once it is certified, as corrective measures to prevent products from exceeding the standard amount of petroleum base solvent in the product design stage. At the same time, we instructed them to improve and clarify their internal inspection system. The Eco Mark Office ensured 7 companies to implement these corrective actions during on-site inspection.

We will continue to foster communications with companies produce the Eco Mark certified printing ink to ensure the compliance with our certification standards and the provision of appropriate environmental information.

3. Measures against falsification of products (excluding paper products) made of reprocessed materials such as recycled plastics

In early February, one plastic manufacturer made an announcement of the deviation of the percentage of recycled plastic in a recycled plastic product, "Ecohappoto" (non-Eco Mark molded sheets made from polypropylene with a foaming agent added, mainly used as raw material for plastic document files, etc.)

We made an on-site inspection of the company's Eco Mark certified product "Kamome Pack" (garbage bag), and confirmed that this certified product (containing

more than 50% recycled plastics) had been made properly.

We have requested 757 companies, who sell certified products (excluding paper products) made of reprocessed materials such as recycled plastics, recycled PET fibers, etc., to make self-inspection and confirmation of the ratio of reprocessed materials for their 2,225 products. We have received results from 611 companies by the end of March. We found that 12 companies (4 of the companies receiving OEM products from 1 of them) did not conform to our certification standards of reprocessed materials, and instructed them to make correction.

We will continue to make this survey for thorough inspection of Eco Mark certified products made of reprocessed materials.

4. Examination for preventive measures against a recurrence of environmental falsification problem

The Eco Mark Office will examine preventive measures to keep similar problem from happening again by establishing the Committee to review the Eco Mark certification system and its operation under the initiative of the Eco Mark Steering Committee, when we complete our thorough inspections related to the above-mentioned environmental falsification problems.

The Committee will mainly consist of members of the Steering Committee and begin a discussion in May. In consideration of our thorough inspection results, it will broadly discuss, as preventive measures, the strategies for improving our system and its operation, such as improvement of Eco Mark certification procedure including request of submission of a report on inspection at plants with check-list and inquiry of the responsible person at the plants about it, and random on-site inspection by Eco Mark Office officials, and aim to ensure the compliance with our certification standards and the provision of appropriate environmental information.