



Eco Mark News

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The "Eco Mark News" has been published since June 14, 1996 by Eco Mark Office in response to a revision of the "General Procedures for the Eco Mark Program". In this "Eco Mark News", the information related to Eco Mark Program such as newly selected Eco Mark product category and proposals for certification criteria is provided on the basis of the "General Procedures for the Eco Mark Program".

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■ Many people come and visit to Osaka ATC Green Eco Plaza → page 2

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Committee Report/Decisions

Eco Mark Steering Committee (8th meeting)

The 8th Eco Mark Steering Committee (Chairman: Prof. Akio Morishima, Graduate School of Toa University) was held on March 6, 2002 at the Japan Environment Association. After the discussion, the following decisions were made;

<Decisions>

- Eco Mark Work Plan and Budget of Fiscal Year 2002 was approved.

- The Eco Mark Steering Committee has decided to continue its debate on the current draft of the blueprint for the Eco Mark Mid- and Long-Term Work Plan into subsequent sessions.

<Topics reported>

- The status of the Eco Mark activities for Fiscal 2001 and the progress achieved were reported on in order to introduce a broad array of topics including last year's progress in formulating commodity type approval criteria, preparing a consumer leaflet, and establishing mutual recognition with overseas ecolabeling organizations.
- The scheduled signing of an agreement on mutual recognition on copiers with the Nordic Swan (Nordic ecolabeling) in March was also reported.

Information

Green Purchasing Law Specified Eco-products and Eco Mark Fiscal Year 2002 Leaflet is Prepared

We at Eco Mark will be focusing on making more information on Eco-products available to governmental agencies and local governments as part of our ongoing efforts to support green purchasing. The "Green Purchasing Law Specified Eco-products and Eco Mark Fiscal Year 2002 Leaflet" (Fiscal 2002 edition, A4 size, double-sided) has been compiled and will be effective as of April 1, 2002 for keeping in pace with amendments to the key guidelines on procuring environmental commodities under the Green Purchasing Law. The Leaflet will provide information on the availability of Eco-products that fall into any designated procurement categories under the Green Purchasing Plan. We will be distributing this leaflet widely with particular emphasis on the central and local governments. Please consult the Eco Mark Secretariat if you wish to distribute the leaflet on your own.

Eco Mark Zone at Osaka ATC

The Eco Mark Zone at the Osaka ATC Green Eco Plaza showcases an array of 400 Eco-products of around 70 companies including construction and installation materials, kitchen and office utensils, stationary, daily necessities, packaging materials, paper and OA forms, and textile products. Since opening in June two years ago, the site has been visited by over 340,000 people, including group tours from local governments and schools. Stop by at the Eco Mark Zone at the ATC Green Eco Plaza and see for yourself.

ATC Green Eco Plaza "Eco Mark Zone"

Closed on Wednesdays

Open 10:30 – 17:30

Admission Free

Get off the New Tram Line at "Trade Center Mae" station

TEL: 06 (6615) 5888 FAX: 06 (6615) 5890

Eco Mark Consultation Meeting (will be held on April 12, Friday)

We will hold an "Eco Mark Consultation Meeting (the 3rd)" on application, which we started at Osaka ATC Green Eco Plaza last year, on April 12, Friday. Consultation is only in Japanese.

Date and Time: April 12, 2002 (Fri.) 1) 11:00-12:00 2) 13:00-17:00

Place: ATC Green Eco Plaza (Eco Mark Zone in Green Eco Plaza, 11F, ITM Bldg., Asia and Pacific Trade Center 2-1-10, Nankoku, Suminoe-ku, Osaka-shi)

Manner: Individual consultation on application

(Staff from Eco Mark Office will consult with you.)

Consultation Fee: Free

If you wish to attend the consultation, please apply for Eco Mark Office with following information by e-mail or fax. Please understand that we will accept early arrivals when applications exceed our capacity.

1) Company/Organization 2) Names of attendants

3) Phone number of attendants

4) What do you wish to consult about?

(Please specify the product and questions.)

<To apply>

E-mail: vq2r-oosw@asahi-net.or.jp

FAX: 03 (3508) 2656

Contact Mr. Oosawa, Certification Section

Topics

Report on Eco Mark Symposium (East Japan) part 2 — Summary of Keynote Speech "Aiming at Sustainable Consumption: The Eco Mark and Green Consumers"

Professor Gunjima Takashi of the Faculty of Economics at Doshisha University delivered the keynote speech at the symposium held on February 4 this year. A summary of the speech is provided below. Full coverage of the message will be available at our website in late March.

When you look up the term "consumer" in a dictionary, the first entry you see is "destroyer." You might also find these

definitions: one who demolishes or devastates something, one who is avaricious, and who has boundless desires. I would like to focus my speech today on how consumers characterized by these definitions can become green consumers.

The post-war consumer movement, as we look back, has undergone three major phases before creating green consumers. One was the post-war era of commodity shortages, in which goods sold well no matter how poor the quality was. As a consequence, inferior goods flooded the marketplace. This set a consumer movement into motion in pursuit of lower-priced and better-quality products, which was probably sparked by a ban on low quality matches. The contemporary businesses were socially responsible for filling this need, and consumers supported this corporate attitude.

With the onset of the period of rapid growth rates, we enjoyed abundant commodities, which in turn meant abundant waste. Then, came a dispute over how to review our waste-oriented society that builds on cycles of mass-production, mass-consumption, and mass-disposal. This dispute opened ways for mass-recycling large waste volumes at their destination, rather than dismantling mass-production and mass-consumption.

Subsequently, as we began to reflect on the wealth of commodities surrounding us, we turned our eyes to the waste flooding into our homes because the classified discharge of waste from our homes was not enough to solve the problem. Consumers, however, were now left at a loss as to how to deal with waste at the source.

Consumers have begun, however, to recognize the supreme importance of their purchasing behavior, their preparation for handling waste at the source, and using consumption technology to control outgoing waste. As consumers learn the consumption technology of the maximum or thorough use of the goods they buy, a recycling concept takes shape in a vague form. As a sophisticated segment of consumers gradually acquire such know-how, they seem to claim to be green consumers.

In 1988, John Elkington wrote a book in the U.K. entitled "The Green Consumer Guide". In those days, political action was one option available to consumers meeting environmental conservation goals. They elected environmentalist representatives by voting. This enabled a Parliament composed of environmentalists to create environmental legislature and mold their society, through voting, into an environmentally friendly society. John Elkington's contribution hinted at the possibility of addressing environmental issues through our day-to-day economic behavior, that is, daily shopping at supermarkets. Then, green consumers emerged to demonstrate this. Choosing to buy a product from among multiple choices supports the producer and not choosing to buy a product rejects the producer. Choosing businesses through daily green purchasing behavior would grant more support to businesses in their efforts to build a better future, and the businesses could work together with green consumers in this direction. This was successfully proven in a case study in the U.K. The Sainsbury supermarket chain was number one in retail sales in the U.K. when Tesco, the number two retailer, began offering an assortment of environmentally friendly goods. As consumers learned that they could buy environmentally friendly goods at Tesco's, the supermarket rose to the number one position. This success story suggested that environmentally conscious consumers were taking action.

It also means that there are several ways in which consumers can protect the environment. First, consumers can choose to meet their needs with less satisfaction (consume less) when their consumption can lead to global or environmental devastation. Second, consumers can consume with different life styles (consume differently). Third, they can choose to consume more effectively (consume efficiently). All these keywords can be put in one term: consume wisely. As consumers change to wisely consume and businesses change accordingly, a relationship of mutual aid will come into shape, molding a new society.

The problem is that businesses are motivated to create environmentally friendly goods when such consumers exist and are willing to buy these goods. In reality, however, these goods do not sell well. This is the major problem with such goods. This problem later developed into green marketing to explore the backgrounds of green consumers. Various surveys and polls have been conducted, but have yielded different findings depending on their methodology and timing. Business trends make the behavior of green consumers visible or invisible. In times of economic depression, more emphasis is placed on pricing and quality and environmental provisions do not have a more significant effect on consumers' buying behavior.

If so, this means that green consumers probably do not exist as a solid mass, and it has been recently said that green consumers do not act as a group together. Green consumers simply existed as a boom. The first boom appeared in the late 1980's and the second in and around 1992 when a global summit was held. In their third boom, visible green consumers made their appearance on occasion.

Another dispute is that all green consumers are not alike. Green consumers have become diversified and possess different levels of awareness, action, and motivation. I term consumers who purchase without heeding environmental issues as "indifferentists". In contrast, I call consumers who have interest in and knowledge of environmental issues, but do not act accordingly, as "theorists". The third group of consumers is those who are interested in environmental issues and take environmentally conscious actions. Looking at what these people choose to buy is bound to show refills and energy-saving goods. Refills, of course, lead to reducing waste, but consumers actually choose them because they are more economical. Consumers buy energy-saving goods because they reduce electricity bills, not because they cut CO₂ emissions. These consumers are economically motivated, but they still help to reduce waste and cut CO₂ emissions as "homemakers". These consumers are called "dark green" abroad, probably because they are not very green in their thoughts. The last group of consumers is those who are conscious, active, and are not economically motivated. They are willing to buy goods regardless of cost and low quality in order to protect the environment. In English terms, they are called "hard green". These consumers are probably green consumers in the true sense.

If all green consumers are not grouped into a single category, then what is the share of each group? A survey conducted in the Kansai area reported that theorists and homemakers account for a greater proportion of Japanese green consumers, changing towards ecolife supporters and indifferentists from time to time. Even homemakers, for example, might occasionally choose expensive goods. Organic vegetables sell because they are safer, not because they help to protect the environment. They are costly but are regarded with a sense of value due to safety and health. Green consumers take interest in such resources and energy-saving goods to help protect the environment in conjunction with their personal interests. Linking their interest to green purchasing is of key importance.

Two axes are said to exist abroad in locating green consumers. One is how to think of pricing, quality, and the environment. There were times when consumers sought low-cost quality goods and these goods sold as producers made them available. Then tradeoffs comparing environmental protection with pricing and quality became prominent. Consumers swing towards green or non-green depending on how they view the tradeoffs. This axis is called a "compromise". In Japan, "greedy" green consumers who insist on maintaining compatibility among environmental protection, pricing, and quality are more dominant than green consumers who recognize

the relationships of tradeoffs among these factors.

A survey in Kyoto, for example, asked consumers if they carried a shopping bag when shopping. One reasonable behavioral pattern should be that consumers carrying a shopping bag reject polyethylene bags at checkout counters. When asked if they reject polyethylene bags at the checkout counters, however, these consumers answered negatively. Many carried shopping bags, but few refused polyethylene bags. In short, consumers were greedy enough to carry shopping bags, but they also received polyethylene bags at the checkout counters. Many other incentives are also behind the consumers' shopping behavior, adding to the difficulty of satisfying Japanese consumers without providing products that address quality, pricing, and environmental protection at the same time.

It would be wrong, however, for businesses to assume that the tradeoffs between environmental protection compared with pricing and quality such as are found in the U.S. and European nations should be extended to these greedy green Japanese consumers. This is because products that satisfy greedy green Japanese consumers should also sell abroad as well. I think that creating products that address these three requirements of quality, pricing, and environmental protection should be the Japanese production standard for the world market. Such products are evolving, although in limited quantities, including hand-wound watches featuring a quartz-equivalent for precision and reduced mercury content for environmental protection, and smear-free toilets that are surface-treated with photo-catalysts to eliminate the troublesome need for cleaning and consequently economize on detergent and water usage. Addressing both quality and environmental protection requirements at once is technically feasible. In the present era of abundance, however, the sense of value of these products has shifted to the buyers. Namely, the price of each product is determined depending on whether the combined concept of quality and price suits the shopper's lifestyle.

The other axis is reliability. Consumers are keen to discern whether claims for environmental friendliness are true or false. Ecolabeling labels products with claims for environmental friendliness, prompting the consumer to "trust me". A "read me" type of ecolabeling is also available, in which life cycle assessment (LCA) data is presented to invite the consumer to determine the validity of each product's environmental friendliness from that data.

The problem then amounts to the creditability of the mark that the product bears. Consumers do not put too much faith in producer claims unless the product can be validated by third party follow-up. Neither do consumers put faith in trust-me type marks without further validation. Judgment based on scientific information is required. Fortunately, Eco-marking encompasses LCA-like considerations in an effort to enhance creditability based on more scientific information. With ecolabeling based on manufacturer's claims, the judgment criteria and review process are not open, so that consumers do not know what is happening. Transparency that allows consumers to validate the data and scientific evidence is required for ecolabeling to win consumers' trust. Therefore, ecolabeling should be administered by authoritative organizations while exercising authority. Most importantly, all should endeavor to accredit those organizations in a democratic process. Reliability in crediting certification by such organizations is essential. This was first implemented in 1947 in the U.K. when the Soil Association was established to come up with ecolabeling that sets forth extremely exacting criteria, mainly for organic vegetables.

Further, as the communication channels become diversified to deliver an excess of information, consumers become unable to decide what information is correct. Their anxiety mounts because too much information emerges before they can determine the validity of the existing information. In Japan, negative expressions have been used to eliminate such anxiety in order to assure the consumer of reliability. These expressions include "do not buy something" and "we do not use genetically combined products". Green consumers, however, should not view a particular product as reliable by avoiding specific actions to eliminate their anxiety. They should positively trust the environmental friendliness of a product in a relationship of trust that is mutually agreeable for consumers and producers. This is where the main problem exists today. In the meantime, we need to promote Eco Mark to gain wider-spread popularity. Heightening the requirements for Eco Mark to augment its authority or creditability, however, would end up with few products that qualify for Eco Mark. The key question is how we can collaborate with green consumers in promoting the popularity of Eco Mark while enhancing its reliability.

Eco Mark should be administered together with green consumers to grant it more authority and more creditability. Marketing experts abroad say that there are not green consumers; consumers simply swing back and forth between two axes. We need to exploit new environmentally friendly marketplaces together with green consumers and by fostering green consumers with these axes in mind. In other words, green consumers and green producers should be working together. Consumer and business associations alike join Eco Mark committees to debate various Eco Mark issues and to offer Internet access to these discussions. I hope that Eco Mark will become more reliable and more green consumers will be created in the process.

Takashi Gunjima

<Professor of the Faculty of Economics, Doshisha University>

Graduated from the Faculty of Economics, Doshisha University and became the Professor in 1984. Served as committee chairperson of the Low Environmental Load Economics Research Workshop of the Ministry of the Environment, and as committee chairperson of the Water Front Recycling Industrial Complex Initiative Workshop of the Ministry of Land, Infrastructure and Transport. Now committee chairperson of the Eco Mark Committee for Establishing Category and Criteria.

