

Questions and Answers about Nordic Ecolabelled Fuels

The official editing of the Nordic Ecolabelled fuels requirements is presently being done. The official criterion document will be available in August

1. Why are you Ecolabelling fuels?

We want to show the best alternatives among renewable fuels. Global warming and the climate change are significant and actions must be taken to reduce their impact while making improvements in energy efficiency. Our requirements also take into consideration other environmental factors. Our goal is to help companies produce more environmentally-sound fuels as well as helping consumers to choose more environmentally-sound choices.

2. Can one really Ecolabel something that, per definition, destroys the environment?

One of Nordic Ecolabel's most important tasks is to create possibilities for energy producers to market more environmentally-sound products. We choose the product groups from the perspective that these groups, by being Ecolabelled, can make an environmental difference. Ecolabelling fuels is a typical example since they are used in great quantities, and long-term beneficial environmental effects can be achieved.

3. When can I buy Ecolabelled fuels?

Our requirements or criterion are now (July 2008) established and several energy providers are already contacting us to receive a Nordic Ecolabel. Our hope is that these products will be approved by us and be on the market this fall.

4. Is the quality the same for these Ecolabelled fuels as for non-Ecolabelled?

Yes, and our requirements must also be fulfilled. Nordic Ecolabelled fuels must also comply with stringent requirements for reducing their environmental effects.

5. What kinds of fuels can be Ecolabelled?

Our requirements cover all alternative types of fuels to fossil fuels, for example ethanol, biodiesel, biogas and different fuel mixtures.

6. Bio fuels "cost" a lot of energy to produce. How can they receive a Nordic Ecolabel?

It is correct that the energy used to produce bio fuels are higher than for fossil fuels, that are "ready" to use after they have been extracted from the earth. The Nordic Ecolabel has a level requirement that must be met for the amount of energy that can be used to produce an Ecolabelled bio fuel.

7. What types of requirements have you set?

The Nordic Ecolabel has set requirements for the entire life cycle of the fuel, from when it is produced to the finished product. The most important requirement concerns reducing the fuel's CO₂ levels, and these are measured for the product's entire life cycle, from the choice of agricultural land, cultivation, production, transportation to the CO₂ amounts created by the fuel's combustion. A maximum of 50 grams CO₂ per mega joule fuel is the level allowed.

This means for example that Nordic Ecolabelled ethanol must have at least 65 percent less CO₂ levels than fossil petrol.

The Nordic Ecolabel also sets limits to the total energy use when producing Ecolabelled fuels since energy must not be wasted even if it is used to produce Ecolabelled fuels.

The raw materials that are used for the fuels also must meet the Nordic Ecolabelled requirements for traceability. The agriculture land used must easily be identified and also certified as sustainable farming. Certification implies that

consideration must be taken to ecological, economical and social aspects. One may, for example, not use protected rain forests. Raw materials from grains, maize (corn), millet or rice may not be used.

The Nordic Ecolabel also has requirements to minimize health effects from a car's exhaust systems.

Fuels must also fulfil current quality standards.

8. How is the energy requirement set?

The Nordic Ecolabel uses the parameter primary energy to document the level of energy used. It is, to be concise, the amount of energy used to produce a defined amount of fuel. All energy used in the production process is calculated.

9. Which renewal fuels are on the market today?

In Sweden E85 is the most common fuel. Most of the biodiesel on the Nordic market is based on rapeseed, fish waste and animal fat as well as palm oil.

10. Why doesn't the Nordic Ecolabel allow grains?

In this first release of our requirements (note: The Nordic Ecolabel revises its product group requirements every third to fourth year), it was decided not to allow fuels that are based on grains, maize (corn), millet or rice. It is too great an uncertainty between food production and oil production at the current time.

11. The rain forest is being destroyed to produce palm oil for fuel production. Can this kind of biodiesel be Ecolabelled?

No. We require that a CO₂ balance is not negative. One may not destroy a rain forest to grow for example a palm tree. This is the essence of the Nordic Ecolabel's requirements for a sustainable agriculture or forestry. The Nordic Ecolabel requires a 100 % certified palm oil production if it is to be used in Ecolabelled fuels.

12. There have been many reports from Brazilian sugar beet fields showing child labour and terrible working conditions. What does the Nordic Ecolabel plan on doing about this?

The Nordic Ecolabel has requirements for certified, sustainable farming of the raw materials used in Ecolabelled fuels. Certification means that social and ethical aspects such as working conditions and child labour, as well as ecological and economical aspects must be met. The country's laws in regard to these areas must also be followed.

13. Fuels are transported often far distances. Ethanol from Brazil is an example. How great are the environmental effects of this transportation?

Transportation is a relatively small part of a biofuels total environmental impact, even though the transportation distances may be long. Cultivation and production have far greater environmental impacts. But to receive a Nordic Ecolabel even transportation is included in the Nordic Ecolabel criteria and the climate impacts it causes.

14. Why do you have these requirements now?

The Nordic Ecolabel wants to give both consumers and wholesale buyers alternative fuels to the present fossil-based fuels. Ecolabelling fuels also create more pressure on producers to develop working methods to provide alternative fuels that come from sustainable farming. We also hope that our requirements will help producers realize that renewal fuels are not enough; fuels must also fulfil life-cycle requirements for a good energy and CO₂ balance and be health neutral. Another goal is that our requirements are transparent, require traceability and increase the amount of certified sustainable farming. This in turn can help to increase the chances for better social and working conditions for farmers.