Environmental Product Declarations: What They Are & Why You Should Use Them

More and more, the general public, government and investors are demanding that manufacturers make environmentally responsible products—and be able to show the environmental impact of those products throughout their life cycles. But companies sometimes make misleading or false claims about the environmental impacts or benefits of their products. One way to provide reliable environmental information is through an environmental product declaration (EPD) that's confirmed by a third party. We'll explain what EPDs are, how they're created and the benefits of using them. And at the end, there are links to various EPDs.

What's an EPD'

According to a white paper by the Underwriter Laboratory (UL) Environment Inc., an EPD is a comprehensive disclosure of a product's life cycle-based environmental impact that has been validated by an independent third party. An EPD is based on the results of a product's life cycle assessment (LCA) as well as other relevant information. In general, an EPD will include information on the product's:

- Carbon footprint;
- Potential impact on global warming, ozone depletion, acidification of land and water, eutrophication (an impact of water pollution), photochemical ozone creation and the depletion of abiotic resources; and
- Other pertinent environmental and health-related impacts.

Under ISO 14025, Environmental labels and declarations, EPDs are considered Type III eco-labels, which are succinct, fact-based documents that provide specific information by category. Unlike other types of environmental labels, Type III eco-labels requires independent validation of a product's environmental impact. Thus, EPDs provide greater transparency and reliability.

How EPDs Are Created

The UL paper explains that there are five steps in the creation of an ISO 14025-

compliant EPD:

1. Select the appropriate product category rule. Product category rules (PCRs) describe how an LCA should be performed for a particular type of product and provide the data foundation for an EPD and detailed requirements for additional environmental and health information disclosure. So the first step in creating an EPD is to find an applicable PCR for a particular product. When an appropriate PCR doesn't exist, a new PCR must be developed and approved for use through a credible EPD program operator.

2. Conduct and verify the product's LCA. A range of factors is used to assess a product's environmental performance, including energy and resource consumption, waste generation, pollutant emissions, impacts during use and end-of-life considerations. An LCA provides a structure for identifying and assessing these and other factors. Once an LCA is conducted on a particular product, it must be verified by an independent party to determine that it meets the requirements defined in the PCR.

3. Compile the EPD. Once the LCA has been completed and verified, an EPD can then be prepared. The EPD presents the results of the LCA as well as additional information about the product's performance and other sustainability information.

4. Verify the EPD. The completed EPD must be submitted to an independent third-party for a thorough review and verification of the information it contains. This step is normally conducted through an EPD program operator.

5. Register the EPD. The last step is the submission of the final document to an EPD program operator for registration and inclusion in the operator's published list of registered EPDs.

Benefits of EPDs

EPDs are widely used in Europe and gaining in popularity in both the US and Canada. But EPDs aren't currently required by Canadian law. However, there are still benefits of getting them for your company's products anyway. For example, EPDs can be used as:

- A **management tool** to monitor product environmental data and enable the company to use this data to improve product environmental performance;
- A **communication tool** to provide unbiased, objective environmental information on products and enhance overall awareness of products' environmental impact;
- An **evaluation/assessment tool** for benchmarking environmental information and evaluating and making product selection decisions;
- A **procurement tool** to achieve government, institutional or corporate environmental objectives; and
- An **action tool** to broadly disseminate a product's environmental information to the public and identify ways to improve a product's environmental sustainability.

***Insider* Source**

"Transparency and the Role of Environmental Product Declarations," UL University's Thought Leadership, Oct. 2011

Examples of EPDs

To give you an idea what an EPD looks like, here are links to EPDS for various kinds of products:

- Broadloom carpet
- Recycled glass surfacing
- Frequency converter
- Concrete
- Siding
- Escalator
- Locomotive
- Export containers
- Insulated metal panels
- Toilet