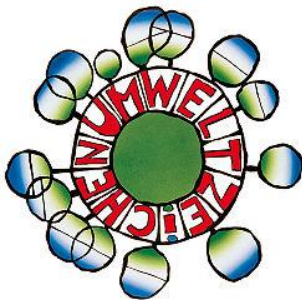


# Austrian Ecolabel – Now also for Footwear

**Germany has its Blue Angel, Austria has its Austrian Ecolabel. Our fellow Europeans have been awarding this national seal of approval for environmentally friendly products and services since 1990. As of July 2014, applications for the label can also be submitted [for footwear](#). [The guidelines for awarding the Austrian Ecolabel](#) resemble those for Germany's [Blue Angel](#). Additionally, the «Restricted Substances List» issued by [CADS](#) has also been included in the award criteria. Mutual recognition of the Blue Angel and the Austrian Ecolabel is a current objective. Nevertheless, a number of differences should be borne in mind.**

The Blue Angel first appeared in 1978 as the world's first ecolabel. It is recognised by some 75 percent (at one stage over 80 percent) of the German population. A poll conducted by the Gallup Institute in 2013 revealed that 56 percent of Austrians are aware of the Austrian Ecolabel, making it the best known ecolabel in Austria.



*The Austrian Ecolabel was introduced in 1990 by the Environment Minister of the time, Dr. Flemming. Originally awarded only for products, the scope of the label was subsequently extended to include services. The ecolabel is now awarded in three categories: for products, in tourism, and in the educational sector. The ecolabel logo was designed by the Austrian artist Friedensreich Hundertwasser and symbolises the elements of ecology: earth, water, nature, and air.*

As of July 2014, applications for the Austrian Ecolabel can also be submitted for footwear. It bears the code name UZ 65. With the goal of attaining mutual recognition of the ecolabels, the Austrian Consumers' Association ([Verein für Konsumenteninformation, VKI](#)) took account of criteria for awarding the Blue Angel mark for footwear (RAL UZ-155) dating from 2011 on drawing up the guidelines for awarding its seal of approval. This means that – with a number of exceptions – submission of the same documents is required on application for both seals of approval. Nevertheless, the criteria for awarding the Austrian Ecolabel do indeed differ somewhat from those valid for the Blue Angel:

- *Application*

In Germany RAL GmbH is the state-authorized awarding agency for the *Blue Angel* ecolabel. Applications are submitted to this body, which examines whether the requisite evidence is complete and correct. In the case of the Austrian Ecolabel, external experts examine the required documents for conformity with the awarding criteria prior to actual submission of the application. The applicant

then receives an expert opinion which is submitted together the other documents to VKI. A list of recognised experts for examining conformity with UZ 65 is available on request from VKI.

- *Tanning processes*

Chrome tanning is allowed for the Blue Angel, provided that the tanning process complies with the current state of the art and that waste water treatment and waste disposal are undertaken correctly. The Austrian Ecolabel is not awarded for chrome-tanned leathers. The main reasons for excluding chrome tanning are the risk of formation of allergenic chromium VI in leather products and the environmental impact associated with disposal of such leathers.

Conventional disposal of shoes via municipal waste, which generally ends up on landfill sites or in incinerators, poses a threat to the environment because chromium-containing seepage water or chromium-VI-containing ash may be released. In addition to chrome tanning agents, the Austrian Ecolabel also excludes the use of other mineral tanning agents such as zirconium, titanium, and aluminium salts. The approved tanning processes with vegetable and/or synthetic tanning agents have to satisfy various criteria relating, for example, to water consumption and effluent load.



- *Hazardous substances*

Further to the hazardous substance criteria valid for awarding the Blue Angel seal, a «Restricted Substances List» (RSL) is also of relevance for the Austrian Ecolabel. The awarding guidelines for the Austrian Ecolabel are revised only once every four years. That has the drawback that they cannot be promptly updated to take account of new legislation pertaining to hazardous substances and that further critical substances cannot be added at short notice. In contrast, the RSL is updated annually. This permits timely consideration of developments in hazardous substance legislation in the label-awarding criteria. The RSL issued by “Co-operation at DSI” (CADS), an association of footwear manufacturers, importers, retailers, chemical industry, and test institutes, was selected for assessing applications for the ecolabel. Wherever the guideline and the RSL give differing limit values for the same hazardous substance, it is always the more rigorous limit value that is to be observed. The current RSL valid at the time of application is therefore always applicable.

- *Labour conditions*

In addition to compliance with the Core Labour Standards of the [International Labour Organisation](#) (ILO) as required by the Blue Angel, the Austrian Ecolabel requires compliance with the [Jo-In Code](#), which includes aspects of labour conditions and social criteria going beyond those set out in the ILO criteria. This places greater focus on social criteria and occupational health and safety.

The other requirements for the Austrian Ecolabel for footwear are comparable with the guidelines for awarding the Blue Angel for footwear and include points such as the origin of raw materials, water consumption, effluent load, and emissions. The UZ 65 guidelines and application documents have been published on the [Website of the Austrian Ecolabel](#) where additional information about the ecolabel can also be found.

Just like the Blue Angel, the Austrian Ecolabel offers companies an opportunity to stand out from the competition through certification and to demonstrate an ecologically responsible production and product policy to consumers. Moreover, meeting the criteria for awarding the two ecolabels places stringent demands on the entire material and footwear production process and compliance with the guidelines represents a major challenge for manufacturers.

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