UL Recycled Content Validation Mark

Sector: Manufacturing sector

Region: Global

Best Practice: The Underwriters Laboratories' (UL) Recycled Content Validation Mark shows that recycled content has been incorporated into the product.

Figure 1

UL's Environmental Claim Validation service and Mark validates that manufacturers product claims made in marketing and packaging materials are factual. Environmental Claim Validations from UL include reclamation facility, biobased content, mold resistance, energy saving power strips, rapidly renewable materials, recycled content, zero waste to landfill, recyclability and VOC content. This case study focuses on UL's Recycled Content Validation Mark (see Figure 1).

Manufacturers can evaluate recycled content to UL's 2809, Environmental Claim Validation Procedure (ECVP) which evaluates the amount of recycled content in products including:
- Post-consumer recycled content
- Pre-consumer (post-industrial) recycled content
- Closed-loop recycled content
- Total recycled content

Receiving the recycled claim validation means that products can feature the UL Recycled Content Validation Mark on their packaging and marketing materials.

UL reaches 2 billion global consumers annually with safety, security and sustainability messages and UL Marks appear on tens of billions of products globally.

Principle 1: Reliability

UL provides independent, third-party, science-based validation on a product's environmental claims and helps demonstrate their sustainability efforts. Through rigorous scientific analysis, businesses that engage with UL can prove that the claims made on their products are upheld in practice.

Build your claims on a reliable basis
- Accurate and scientifically true
- Robust and consistent
- Substantiated data and assumptions

The third-party certification is based on stringent standards and requirements to help deliver credible sustainability messaging. The Mark demonstrates to consumers that the product has been tested by a neutral third-party and independently validated to have performed in accordance with its environmental claims.

Principle 2: Relevance

UL 2809: ECVP for Recycled Content include assessments of the social impacts on local economies of collecting pre-consumer and post-consumer recycled materials. UL 2809 verifies the amount of ocean-bound and ocean-sourced plastics used in products: ocean-bound plastics are plastics which are not likely to be collected and are found close to the ocean, ocean-sourced plastics are plastics that are found in the ocean.

Talk about major improvements, in areas that matter
- Significant aspects ('hotspots') covered
- Not masking poor product performance, no burden shifting
- Genuine benefit which goes beyond legal compliance

UL 2809 for Recycled Content specifically measures the amount of recycled content in products. It validates pre-consumer and/or post-consumer defined source material content and demonstrates to consumers that validated products are made with recycled materials.

Principle 3: Clarity

The presence of the Mark gives consumers confidence that the products they are choosing are made from recycled content as this information is made clear on the Mark. It also helps consumers to recognise businesses' recycling efforts and commitment to circularity.

Make the information useful for the consumer
- Exclusive and direct link between claim and product
- Explicit and easy to understand
- Limits of claim clearly stated

The Mark states the minimum recycled content, therefore providing consumers with clear information about the product's sustainable attributes.

Principle 4: Transparency

To find information about UL certified products and components, users can access the UL SPOT® Product Guide, a free UL SPOT® account that enables consumers to identify validated products (including products certified to UL 2809) by product category, company name, product name or type of claim.

Satisfy the consumer's appetite for information, and do not hide
- Developer of the claim and provider of evidence published
- Traceability and generation of claim (methods, sources, etc.) published
- Confidential information open to competent bodies

Consumers can also retrieve data on the UL Product iQ website: A free Product iQ account helps consumers to verify UL certification of products and components (including on recycled content), locate UL guide information and search for alternative certified products.

Principle 5: Accessibility

The mark is clearly visible on the packaging and is close to the product and at the required time and location (i.e., it features on-pack).

Let the information get to the consumer, not the other way around
- Clearly visible: claim easily found
- Readily accessible: claim close to the product, and at required time and location

A UL weblink is clearly displayed on the Mark (see Figure 1) and directs consumers to a page which includes an overview of the products UL certifies, as well as brochures and a whitepaper on 'Making Effective Sustainability Claims'.

Key learnings

- The Mark informs the consumers on the amount of recycled content in the product; this could be further improved by adding the type of recycled content used to help consumers make comparisons between different products.
- The criteria for the UL 2809 include social and economic impacts which other standard-setters/labelling organisations can take inspiration from.
- UL's testing methods provide authenticity of the recycled content of a product. With a growing market of non-verified claims on 'recycled content', this is especially important to ensure credibility.

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