



Press Release

Luxembourg, 15 January 2020

EU ecodesign and energy labels improving energy efficiency, say Auditors

EU action on ecodesign and energy labelling has contributed to greater energy efficiency, according to a new report from the European Court of Auditors. However, there were significant delays in the regulatory process and the impact of the policy risked being overestimated. In addition, non-compliance with the regulation by manufacturers and retailers remains a significant issue, say the auditors.

As part of its fight against climate change, the EU is committed to improving its energy efficiency by 20% by 2020 and 32.5% by 2030. To help achieve these targets, the European Commission has taken measures focusing on greener product design (ecodesign) and consumer information on energy consumption and environmental performance (energy labelling).

The auditors confirmed that the Commission had used sound and transparent methodologies to select the regulated products. This has resulted in EU policy prioritising over 30 product groups with the highest energy-saving potential. At the same time, the auditors noted avoidable delays in the regulatory process, which reduced the impact of the policy as ecodesign requirements were likely to be outdated and energy labels no longer relevant to help consumers differentiate between the best and worst performing products. Meanwhile, the Commission is taking steps to improve energy labels. However, integration of the circular economy remains ad hoc, say the auditors.

The Commission regularly reports on the results of its ecodesign and energy labelling policy. Some assumptions used, however, are likely to have overestimated the impact of the policy. For instance, they do not consider non-compliance with the regulations, nor implementation delays. Moreover, the Ecodesign Impact Accounting (EIA) does not take into account the difference between theoretical consumption derived from harmonised standards and real-life energy consumption. For example, fridge-freezers are tested without opening the doors and with no food inside. There is therefore a risk that savings are overestimated, the auditors warn.

In EU Member States, market surveillance authorities (MSAs) are responsible for ensuring that products sold on their territory are compliant with energy labelling and ecodesign legislation. The Commission, however, plays an important role in facilitating cooperation between MSAs. The information and communication system on market surveillance is intended to help share inspection results, though some functional limitations reduce its effectiveness.

The purpose of this press release is to convey the main messages of the European Court of Auditors' special report. The full report is available at eca.europa.eu.

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The Commission has also funded several projects over the last decade to strengthen surveillance of ecodesign and energy labelling, with positive results, say the auditors. However, it remains doubtful whether these have really changed the way Member States perform their market surveillance duties. In practice, the number of product models tested in laboratories is still relatively small. Overall, the Commission recently estimated that 10 to 25% of products sold do not comply with EU law. The auditors conclude that non-compliance by manufacturers and retailers remains a significant issue.

In order to enhance the impact of the ecodesign and energy labelling policy for the period after 2020, the auditors make a number of recommendations to the European Commission covering:

- measures to speed up the regulatory process, for instance by adopting implementing measures when they are ready, rather than when a package is complete;
- improvements in the way the impact of the policy is measured and reported, by improving assumptions and using a methodology that measures actual energy consumption by end users; and
- action to facilitate information exchange between market surveillance authorities in Member States and to improve compliance with the policy. This should include improving relevant tools for Member States, disseminating best practices and providing training upon request.

Notes to Editors

Ecodesign and energy labels are complementary:

- EU ecodesign legislation works by laying down energy efficiency and other requirements for product design, thereby improving environmental performance. Products that do not meet these requirements cannot be sold in the EU, thus removing the worst-performing products from the market.
- EU energy labels show how an appliance ranks on a scale from A to G according to its energy consumption. They estimate the annual energy consumed by each product and rank similar products according to their energy efficiency class. This allows consumers to make informed decisions.

Special report 01/2020 “EU action on Ecodesign and Energy labelling: important contribution to greater energy efficiency reduced by significant delays and non-compliance” is available on the ECA website (eca.europa.eu) in 23 EU languages.

The ECA presents its special reports to the European Parliament and the Council of the EU, as well as to other interested parties such as national parliaments, industry stakeholders and representatives of civil society. The vast majority of the recommendations we make in our reports are put into practice.

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