

ECO₂L – Climate responsibility certified

The first certificate in modern leather production that focuses on energy efficiency and sustainability has been devised by the VDL in Germany in collaboration with FILK. Dr Thomas Schröder, Managing Director, German Leather Federation (Verband der Deutschen Lederindustrie) explains

In this century climate change is one of the central challenges for our society. To reduce the impact of global warming on people and nature, the average temperature rise globally must be reduced considerably up to the end of this century and beyond.

This requires a change in basic views when considering the production of goods and services, performances and consumption.

For businesses reliable information is needed about greenhouse gas emissions, which are connected to the production of their products. The following management rule is then adopted: 'Only measurable values can be managed'.

ECO₂L label

The German Leather Federation have devised the ECO₂L label (energy controlled leather), which is the world's first calculation and auditing model for determining the energy efficiency and the CO₂ emissions of a tannery. ECO₂L was developed by the Forschungsgemeinschaft Leder (Leather Research Foundation) as an active contribution towards responsible climate protection for the leather industry.

The prerequisites for issuing a ECO₂L label are the systematic measurement of a tannery's specific Corporate Carbon Footprint (CCF) based on the energy benchmark 'Best Energy Efficiency for Tanning' (BEET) in MJ/m².

As a comparison the 'Best Available Techniques for the Tanning of Hides and Skins' specified by the EU were used to benchmark BEET. This establishes a strict standard reference value for the energy consumption of all production processes within defined limits.

With the help of BEET, a leather factory can compare its own energy data to the

benchmark and compare the energy efficiency of their own production processes by comparing the deviation of the results. All internal and external energy sources for the tannery are taken into account. A direct comparison with other tanneries is possible at any time.

For a successful ECO₂L audit a tannery may exceed the corresponding strict BEET standard by a maximum of 20%, which takes, for example, local climatic factors into account.

ECO₂L was developed primarily for the production of upholstery leather from cowhide, but can also be used for shoe upper leather. The model cannot be used for the small skin (sheep/goat etc) sector at this time due to the lack of benchmark data.

The CCF is determined on the site of production, taking into account the raw materials that are used (raw or semi-processed hides) and the various products used including a defined upstream and downstream chain (eg chemical procurement, the treatment of exhaust air, wastewater and waste) within defined system boundaries. It is calculated in kg CO₂/m² of leather or product mix.

Carbon footprint

By definition, the CCF is only examined after the production of the hide. The impact of CO₂ equivalents caused by raising and butchering cattle as the hide is a byproduct and without leather production would have to be disposed of with a negative CO₂ balance.

Each hide is utilised by tanners, creating high-quality natural leather from a renewable resource of animal origins. The ECO₂L certificate documents provide evidence that this product was produced in a sustainable and energy-efficient



The ECO₂L presentation of the new climate label. From left, Thomas Strebost, Chairman of VDL, Jutta Knödler, Environmental Expert and Auditor, Dr Thomas Schröder, Managing Director of VDL, Prof Dr Michael Stoll, Managing Director of FILK

manner.

The ECO₂L advantages for the tanner:

- Knowledge of the annual specific energy consumption (MJ/m²) in production
- Identification of energy consumption compared to the international benchmark, as well as developing concrete options to reduce energy consumption
- Evidence of energy-efficient production by using the ECO₂L certificate
- Calculation option for planned alternative actions to improve the corporate carbon footprint (CO₂ emissions) through variations of production, procurement of raw material, chemicals, energy and disposal of byproducts, wastes and wastewater

The ECO₂L certificate is awarded by the independent Forschungsinstitut für Leder- und Kunststoffbahnen (FILK). Auditing is conducted on behalf of FILK by independent, officially appointed auditors.

Further information about this audit and the certificate can be found at www.eco2l-leather.com ■