Korea*– Japan**
International Cooperation on Type I Eco-Labeling
- Analysis of Its Performance & Future Directions –
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Abstract
Korea Environmental Industry and Technology Institute(KEITI) has established Type1 ecolabelling system based on ISO 14024 and managed it since 1992. KEITI has also cooperated with other organizations abroad which is operating ecolabelling system so that ecolabelling system cannot be the barrier to international trade. KEITI has concluded MRA with Japan Environment Association(JEA) and cooperate actively such as developing common criteria. KEITI will increase common criteria, share recent environmental information and finally make our relationship(KEITI-JEA) last and strong.

Keywords:
Type 1 eco-labelling, International cooperation, Japan Environment Association(JEA), Mutual Recognition Agreement(MRA), Common criteria

1. TYPE I- ECO-LABELING SYSTEM
Environmental labelling are the designs or indications adhered and provided to products and service media with the purpose for delivering economical information for products and services to the consumers. The environmental labelling system solves the economical problems that occur due to consumption of products or services and furthermore, devised to expedite sustainable consumption and production. Moreover, the purpose of environmental labelling is to induce eco-friendly consumption patterns by providing economical information for the overall process of products and services(phases of production, distribution, usage and disposal) for consumers and enabling the producers to develop and manufacture products that correspond to the eco-friendly consumption patterns.

International Organization for Standardization(ISO) has classified environmental labelling into 3 types and has regulated the conditions for each type of the environmental labeling in the 14020 series. Among the conditions, Type I Eco-Labeling signifies the method where a 3rd person validates the eco-friendly products by sorting products with smaller environmental influence when compared to other products of same usage over the product’s lifecycle including manufacture, distribution, usage and disposal.

Since its initial enforcement in Germany during 1979, the Eco-labeling system has been successfully enforced in 48 different regions including the European Union, Northern Europe, Canada, the U.S. and Japan. The nation of Korea introduced Eco-Labeling system by establishing the “Laws on Development and Support for Eco-Labeling” in 1994 and the national contest for environmental cover designs in 1990. From then on, the grounds related to the system operations for “Laws on Development and Support for Eco-Labeling” were found in 1994 to establish the Eco-Labeling Association(present, Korea Environmental Industry & Technology Institute, KEITI) to revitalize Eco-labeling system.

The Eco-Labeling system of Korea is generally operated through the following phases.

A. Select subject product group as the category for subject of certification
B. Determine criteria for evaluating the eco-friendliness for selected product group
C. Verify the appropriate certification standards for subject product group when a corporation is to request certification and approve certification for product appropriate to certification standards according to result of deliberation
D. Surveillance check for the certified product to inspect whether the product is consistently satisfying certification standards during the certified period

All nations or organizations that enforce the Type I Eco-Labeling program operate with the similar forms of the system as stated above.
2. INTERNATIONAL STANDARDIZATION AND MUTUAL RECOGNITION ARRANGEMENT OF ECO-LABELING SYSTEM

The international society’s debates on the Eco-Labeling system are accomplished largely by the international organizations including the World Trade Organization(WTO), the International Standardization Organization(ISO) and the Eco-Labeling Operational Institution Conference Group including the Global Eco-Labeling Network(GEN). Major issues include the international standardization for Eco-Labeling system to harmonize with free trade principles for removing irrational trade barrier effects for export products of each nation while expediting developments and supply of eco-friendly products.

WTO supports conclusion of the Mutual Recognition Agreement(MRA) amongst nations so that the conformity evaluation system for the purpose of environment, safety, health, consumer and protection does not act as Technical Barriers to Trade(TBT). Moreover, the Global Eco-Labeling Network(GEN) is actively encouraging the Mutual Recognition Agreement(MRA) to progress the international standardization of Eco-Labeling system.

The Mutual Recognition Agreement(MRA) is the agreement concluded to recognize the “Conformity Assessment” by the agreed nations for regulated products determined by each nation for safety, health, environment, consumer protection. Here, the Conformity Assessment” implies the test, evaluation and judgment of whether the product, process or service satisfies the standards, average or technical regulations. Moreover, “recognition” is recognizing that the results from the opposite side’s conformity assessment and the person involved are equivalent.

The process and method of mutual agreement for Eco-Labeling have the need for the following approach. As the 1st phase, ‘Mutual Recognition for True Nature of Both Nations’ speaks of the mutual recognition that recognizes the opposite nation’s eco-friendly products by verifying the true nature of the Eco-Labeling system between the nations and concluding the memorandum of agreement. KEITI has concluded the 1st phase MRA with Nordic Swan, the Eco-Labeling organization of 5 Nordic nations. As the 2nd phase, ‘Mutual Agreement of Environmental Examination Methods for Products and Examination Organizations’ standardizes the recognition process and evaluation methods for examinations in the nation’s Eco-Labeling institutions to assign the official evaluating organization in each nation to mutually recognize the test results. KEITI has concluded the 2nd phase MRA with Taiwan, Thailand, Australia, China and New Zealand.

The 3rd phase ‘Mutual Recognition by Common Recognition Standards’ is the method of unifying the Eco-Labeling certification standards of a nation to recognize that the certified product has the same eco-friendly excellence as the products certified in the agreed nations.

At the present time, the common standard agreement taking place between Korea and Japan can be considered as a good example of this phase. Lastly, the 4th phase ‘Unification of Eco-Labeling System amongst Nations’ is the method of unifying the different systems of each nation to operate by unifying the operational institution, certification process and test evaluation in one organization. This corresponds to the European Flower system enforced among the member nations of EU or the Nordic Swan that is enforced among the Northern European nations.

3. Korea-Japan Mutual Recognition Agreement

KEITI and Japan Environmental Association(JEA) have recognized the system of both nations in 2003 and concluded MRA that recognizes the official test evaluation results. Since then, the two have consistently progressed the cooperation business for developments of common standards on personal computers(2007) and the multifunctional devices(2010). Since the conclusion of MRA in 2003, when a Korean corporation desires to apply for Japan’s Eco-Mark, the preparations of verification report and test evaluations are deputized by KEITI and when a Japanese corporation desires to acquire the Korea’s Eco-Mark, the reports and test results from the JEA side are recognized.

The common standard developments between Korea and Japan began as the needs to standardize the 3 nations Eco-Labeling certification standards were brought up at the ‘5th Korea-China-Japan Environmental Industry Round Table(RTM)” in 2005. At the 3rd working-level meeting in 2007, personal computers were selected as the subject product for development of common standards and in the same year, the Partial MRA was concluded by RTM for the operation of common standard for ‘personal computers.’ When recognized from the certification organization of one’s own nation that the corporation applying for the opposite nation’s Eco-Labeling is satisfying the common standards through the same MRA, the opposite nation must also recognize this corporation and the corporation that received their nation’s certification for product was enabled to use the opposite nation’s Eco-Label just after receiving the verification for the non-common standards of the opposite nation. Based on the conclusion of the Mutual Recognition Agreement, the discussions for common criteria amongst the 3 nations was more actively progressed and at the 5th working-level meeting in 2008, the common certification criteria for personal computers were finally determined.

At the 8th Korea-China-Japan Round-table Meeting(RTM) in 2008, the ‘multifunctional devices were selected as the next item for development of common standards and through discussion, the common/uncommon standards amongst Korea, China and Japan were finally completed in December of 2009. Due to the position differences on China’s side, the common standard