

## HIGHLIGHTS - TIC Council Webinar: Implementing the Circular Economy Action Plan: how to avoid greenwashing?

On Wednesday 24 November, TIC Council hosted a virtual panel entitled: “Implementing the Circular Economy Action Plan: how to avoid greenwashing?”

### Speakers:

- **Andrea Nam**, Technical Programme Manager, CEN/CENELEC
- **Mathilde Crêpy**, Senior Programme Manager, Ecostandard
- **Rakesh Vazirani**, Head of Sustainability Services, TÜV Rheinland

### Moderator:

- **Martin Michelot**, Executive Director Europe Region, TIC Council

Mr. Michelot kickstarted the webinar with an interactive poll, asking attendees what they think the primary roadblocks and barriers are for the mainstreaming of sustainable products and/or services. The majority of the participants voted for the lack of harmonisation amongst sustainability standards of different countries/regions, with the second one being the lack of policy measures and enforcement for validating sustainability claims.

**Andrea Nam**, Technical Programme Manager at CEN/CENELEC, discussed the influence of circular economy on standardisation. Ms. Nam said that closer cooperation is needed among the sectors, meaning the communication between the producers and recyclers on the design and use of materials involved. Furthermore, broad involvement and exchanges with stakeholders (i.e., industry, SMEs, societal stakeholders, and policy makers) are needed in order to identify the need.

In addition, Ms. Nam presented the Strategic Advisory Body on Environment (SABE) at CEN/CENELEC, which includes a dedicated group on circular economy, being in charge of coordinating standardisation activities in the field of circular economy, to liaise with the European Commission on the policy needs, as well as with international organisations. Furthermore, they focus on identifying and discussing strategic standardisation issues in need of action.

In terms of avoiding greenwashing, Ms. Nam provided the examples to which how standards can help in this aspect, providing examples of product design and consumer information including eco-design and energy labelling, circumvention and actions to prevent it, assessing sustainability in construction, and reliable waste recycling.

Next, **Mathilde Crêpy**, Senior Programme Manager at Ecostandard, touched upon some of the aspects that legislators and standards organisations could do. Ms.

Crêpy showed examples of misleading green claims, taken from Ecostandards' 2021 report which analysed 82 products that showed a high waste volume, as well as generally having a high impact on the environment due to their short lifetime. Following the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) guideline for providing product sustainability information, which provides fundamental principles on how to communicate properly to consumers, it was found that nearly half of the claims made on these 82 products could be assessed as misleading, with many not being third-party verified.

Following this report, Ms. Crêpy presented four recommendations, including the elimination of loose definitions, legislating explicitly on what markets actors may or may not claim, strengthening legislative enforcement and sanctions against greenwashing, and making sustainable products the norm.

Ms. Crêpy concluded her presentation by stating that claims should be brought in line with the circularity hierarchy, standards should better reflect real-life conditions, allocate recycled content across outputs, require sustainable sourcing of biological materials, exclude vague/misleading terms including “circular plastic” or “plastic-free”, and substantiate if advertised as good/better for the environment.

**Rakesh Vazirani**, Head of Sustainability Services at TÜV Rheinland, highlighted the key points made by the previous two speakers, which include credible standards for measuring circular economy, as well as the need for validation in order to avoid greenwashing. He raised the concern from Ms. Crêpy's report about how three quarters of the claims were not validated independently.

Mr. Vazirani commented that in order to have circular economy move ahead faster and in a way which can be trusted, one must look to independent verification, so that whatever has been claimed has been verified by experts based on standards which are consensus-based and which have also been validated by experts who had that competence based on their skillset and knowledge.

He went on to emphasise the value of conformity assessment, and how it is a vital link between standards and reality, providing the example of how members of TIC Council carry out this conformity assessment to check what is the reality, as compared to what is in the standards.

If you wish to know more, you may have a look at the [presentation](#) and the [recording](#) of the event.

Check [our list of webinars](#) to find about more about TIC Council's work in providing thought-provoking presentations on the current market trends and legislative developments around conformity assessment.