
**Ethical claims and supporting
information — Principles and
requirements**

*Déclarations éthiques et informations associées — Principes et
exigences*

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Foreword

ISO (the International Organization for Standardization) and IEC (the International Electrotechnical Commission) form the specialized system for worldwide standardization. National bodies that are members of ISO or IEC participate in the development of International Standards through technical committees established by the respective organization to deal with particular fields of technical activity. ISO and IEC technical committees collaborate in fields of mutual interest. Other international organizations, governmental and non-governmental, in liaison with ISO and IEC, also take part in the work.

The procedures used to develop this document and those intended for its further maintenance are described in the ISO/IEC Directives, Part 1. In particular, the different approval criteria needed for the different types of document should be noted. This document was drafted in accordance with the editorial rules of the ISO/IEC Directives, Part 2 (see www.iso.org/directives).

Attention is drawn to the possibility that some of the elements of this document may be the subject of patent rights. ISO and IEC shall not be held responsible for identifying any or all such patent rights. Details of any patent rights identified during the development of the document will be in the Introduction and/or on the ISO list of patent declarations received (see www.iso.org/patents) or the IEC list of patent declarations received (see <http://patents.iec.ch>).

Any trade name used in this document is information given for the convenience of users and does not constitute an endorsement.

For an explanation of the voluntary nature of standards, the meaning of ISO specific terms and expressions related to conformity assessment, as well as information about ISO's adherence to the World Trade Organization (WTO) principles in the Technical Barriers to Trade (TBT) see www.iso.org/iso/foreword.html.

This document was prepared by the ISO Committee on Conformity Assessment (CASCO), in collaboration with the ISO Committee on Consumer Policy (COPOLCO).

Any feedback or questions on this document should be directed to the user's national standards body. A complete listing of these bodies can be found at www.iso.org/members.html.

Introduction

Ethical claims are being made increasingly often in the marketplace. They cover a wide range of issues relating to environmental sustainability, social and economic justice and animal welfare, among others. This corresponds to increased societal interest in the ethical aspects of organizations, their products and services and supply chains.

Ethical claims can be declared by manufacturers, importers, distributors, retailers or anyone else likely to benefit from such claims. These claims can take the form of statements, symbols or graphics on product or package labels, or in product literature, technical bulletins, advertising, publicity, telemarketing, as well as digital or electronic media, such as the Internet.

The situation is complex — ethical claims vary in scope as they can be single-issue or cover a variety of topics. Some ethical claims are declared individually outside specified programmes whereas others are declared according to a programme, which is overseen by an operating entity. There are also many different communication channels and variations in geographical coverage and types of recognition.

An increasing number of relevant standards and assessment methodologies exist. However, the subject is complicated by there being different individual views about what is ethical and therefore this document does not define ethical behaviour.

The proliferation of ethical claims has led to confusion in the marketplace, particularly where terms are used that are insufficiently or inconsistently defined, and where the scope of a claim, the basis of conformance or method of verification is unclear.

It is important that ethical claims are accurate and not misleading to avoid negative market effects such as trade barriers or unfair competition. The evaluation used by those who make ethical claims needs to be clear, transparent and documented so that those who purchase or can potentially purchase, use or dispose of products can be assured of the reliability of the claims.

This document is intended to facilitate the communication of accurate, credible and verifiable information about the ethical aspects of a product, process, service or organization. It is relevant for the creation of new claims, the improvement of existing claims, and to assist users in understanding claims already in the market place.

In this document, the following verbal forms are used:

- “shall” indicates a requirement;
- “should” indicates a recommendation;
- “may” indicates a permission;
- “can” indicates a possibility or a capability.

Further details can be found in the ISO/IEC Directives, Part 2.

For the purposes of research, users are encouraged to share their views on this document and their priorities for changes to future editions. Click on the link below to take part in the online survey:

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Ethical claims and supporting information — Principles and requirements

1 Scope

This document contains principles and requirements for developing and declaring ethical claims and for providing supporting information, where specific standards have not been developed, or to supplement existing standards.

This document is intended for use by all types of organizations and is applicable to all types of ethical claims relating to a product, process, service or organization.

This document can also be used by those seeking a better understanding of ethical claims and their use. This document can support the development of programmes for aspect-specific and sector-specific ethical claims.

2 Normative references

There are no normative references in this document.

3 Terms and definitions

For the purposes of this document, the following terms and definitions apply.

ISO and IEC maintain terminological databases for use in standardization at the following addresses:

- ISO Online browsing platform: available at <https://www.iso.org/obp>
- IEC Electropedia: available at <http://www.electropedia.org/>

3.1

ethical claim

statement, symbol or graphic that declares one or more ethical aspect of a product, process, service or organization

Note 1 to entry: An ethical claim can take the form of a statement, symbol or graphic on a product or package label, in product literature, in technical bulletins, in advertising or in publicity, amongst other things.

Note 2 to entry: Ethical claims can be declared by persons or organizations such as producers, manufacturers, importers, distributors, retailers or communities.

Note 3 to entry: Ethical aspects can include a broad range of social, economic justice and sustainability issues, e.g. local sourcing, fair trade, humane treatment of animals. Many ethical aspects are described in international documents and programmes identified in the Bibliography.

3.2

explanatory statement

explanation which is needed or given so that an *ethical claim* (3.1) can be properly understood by a user or potential user of the product

[SOURCE: ISO 14021:2016, 3.1.7, modified — The words “environmental claim” have been replaced with “ethical claim” and the words “purchaser, potential purchaser or user” have been replaced with “user or potential user”.]

3.3

life cycle

consecutive and interlinked stages of a product system, from raw material acquisition or generation from natural resources to final disposal

Note 1 to entry: Not all *ethical claims* (3.1) relate to the full life cycle.

[SOURCE: ISO 14040:2006, 3.1, modified — Note 1 to entry has been added.]

3.4

comparative ethical claim

ethical claim (3.1) regarding the superiority or equivalence on one product, process, service or organization versus another product, process, service or organization, or one product, process, service or organization over time

3.5

supporting data

verifiable technical information that substantiates the *ethical claim* (3.1)

3.6

supporting information

available material that supports the *ethical claim* (3.1)

4 Principles

4.1 General

4.1.1 The principles described in this clause provide the basis for the requirements specified in this document. This document does not give specific requirements for all ethical claims. These principles should be applied as guidance for the decisions that can be made in unanticipated situations. Principles are not requirements.

4.1.2 An ethical claim declares an organization's achievement with respect to social, economic justice or sustainability issues (e.g. local sourcing, fair trade, humane treatment of animals and others).

4.1.3 Ethical behaviour equates to policy and action that enables an organization to demonstrate its care for concerns including ecological integrity, social and economic justice and democracy, non-violence and peace.

4.1.4 An ethical claim communicates that an organization achieves established good practices and works continuously to improve these practices.

4.2 Reliability

4.2.1 Principle

Ethical claims are accurate, verifiable, relevant and not misleading.

4.2.2 Rationale

Trust is a prerequisite for ethical claims to be accepted as genuine by prospective users. Telling the truth is fundamental to gaining the trust of interested parties. Therefore, ethical claims are based on substantiated evidence so that interested parties can be sure that their action, based on that ethical claim, contributes to a common good.

4.3 Transparency

4.3.1 Principle

Information concerning the procedure, methodology, and any criteria and assumptions used to support a claim is publicly available and readily accessible.

4.3.2 Rationale

4.3.2.1 Timely and relevant information is available to enable interested parties to substantiate the ethical claim and make an informed decision.

4.3.2.2 Information providers consider the best way of providing timely and relevant information on the product or at point of sale, together with further information (e.g. on company website) for consumers or other interested parties who wish to undertake further research into the claim.

4.4 Relevance

4.4.1 Principle

Ethical claims consider the relevant aspects and reflect best scientific understanding, innovation and applicable codes of good practice, adapted where necessary to local conditions. The development of ethical claims takes into consideration the relevant aspects of the life cycle of a product or the supply chains of an organization.

4.4.2 Rationale

The scope of the ethical claim indicates key aspects, which are fundamental to the ethical performance of the respective product, service, process or organization. Relevance is maintained by adapting the ethical claim to reflect innovation, best practice and differences in conditions. This also enables interested parties to have confidence in the continued relevance of the ethical claim.

4.5 Involvement of interested parties

4.5.1 Principle

Ethical claims are based on criteria developed with the involvement of interested parties, where relevant, including those in developing countries.

4.5.2 Rationale

Ethical claims involve collaborative approaches which increase acceptance and credibility among all interested parties. This behaviour can lead to improvements in the quality of the underlying evidence that supports the claims.

4.6 Equity

4.6.1 Principle

Ethical claims are developed and declared after informed and objective consideration of the distribution of impacts across generations, regions and social groups, and between the economic, social and environmental dimensions of sustainability.

4.6.2 Rationale

There are many ethical aspects and the pursuit of one outcome can have implications for others. The information supporting an ethical claim is based on a life cycle perspective and balanced behaviour, to ensure that while enhancing one aspect of good performance the potential for negative or unintended consequences is addressed.

5 General requirements

5.1.1 The scope of the ethical claim shall:

- a) accurately reflect the ethical issue to be addressed by the claim;
- b) identify all aspects of the product, service, process or organization to be included in the ethical claim;
- c) identify any relevant aspects of the product, service, process or organization that will not be included in the ethical claim.

NOTE If an ethical claim relates to conformity with a particular standard, it is important that the ethical claim is specific in relation to that particular standard and does not broadly imply ethical production.

5.1.2 The requirements of this document shall apply to all aspects that are identified as being included in the scope of the ethical claim.

5.1.3 This document provides requirements for ethical claims. Where appropriate consensus-based standards exist that have more detailed requirements for aspect-specific or sector specific ethical claims, those more specific standards shall be used.

5.1.4 Ethical claims shall be developed with the involvement of relevant interested parties, including developing countries.

5.1.5 Ethical claims shall:

- a) be accurate and not misleading (see [4.2](#));
- b) be unlikely to result in misinterpretation (see [4.2](#));
- c) avoid exaggeration and omissions of facts (see [4.2](#));
- d) take into consideration the fitness for purpose of the product, process, service or organization to ensure that the ethical claim does not mask poor performance (see [4.2](#));
- e) be robust and consistent in order to help users make informed choices (see [4.2](#));
- f) be factual (see [4.2](#) and [4.3](#));
- g) have a substantiated and verifiable basis (see [4.2](#) and [4.3](#));
- h) be supported by documented and verifiable information that is publicly available — where confidential information is used to support the ethical claim, it shall be verified by a competent party (see [4.3](#));
- i) provide adequate supporting information that is accurate and not misleading, to enable users to make informed purchasing decisions (see [4.3](#));
- j) be consistent across all instances where it is made — where the ethical claim is limited in its scope, the limitation shall be stated each time the ethical claim is made (see [4.4](#));
- k) take into consideration relevant aspects within the scope of the claim in order to avoid the potential for one impact to be increased in the process of decreasing another (see [4.4](#));

- l) only relate to an ethical aspect that either exists or is likely to be realized, during the lifetime of the product, process, services or organization (see 4.4);
 - m) address major improvements in areas that matter to ensure that significant aspects (hotspots) are covered and that there are genuine benefits (see 4.4);
 - n) be relevant to the area where the corresponding ethical impact occurs (see 4.4);
- NOTE A process-related claim can be made anywhere, so long as the ethical impact occurs in the area where the process is located. The area will be determined by the nature of the impact.
- o) where applicable, recognize and preserve traditional and local knowledge that contributes to environmental protection and human well-being (see 4.5);
 - p) employ a precautionary approach (see 4.6);
 - q) provide information that is relevant to the actual circumstances (see 4.6);
 - r) be reassessed and updated as necessary to reflect changes in technology, competitive products or other circumstances that could alter the accuracy of the claim (see 4.4 and 4.6);
 - s) be relevant to the particular scope of the claim and used only in an appropriate context or setting (see 4.6).

An overview of 5.1.5 is presented in the flowcharts in Annex B.

6 Requirements for comparative ethical claims

6.1 Comparative ethical claims may be made between an organization's own product, service or process and one of its own current or former products, services or processes or the supply chain. Comparative ethical claims may also be made in respect to an organization over time. Comparisons of ethical claims over time are referred to as performance tracking.

6.2 When the supporting data for an ethical claim is intended to be used for performance tracking, i.e. the calculation of the change over time, for one specific product, service, process or organization, the following requirements for the data shall be met:

- a) the assessments shall be carried out for different points in time;
- b) the change over time shall be calculated using the same method for all subsequent assessments.

6.3 Comparative ethical claims shall be evaluated against one or both of the following:

- a) an organization's own prior process;
- b) an organization's own prior product or service.

6.4 The comparison shall only be made using a recognized methodology and, where relevant, internationally recognized standards (8.3).

6.5 In order to support an improvement being claimed, the comparison needs to be supported by evidence derived from objective and statistically valid data.

6.6 Comparative ethical claims involving all aspects of the subject of the claim shall be:

- a) quantified and calculated using the same units of measurement;
- b) based on the same product model or same stage of the supply chain;

c) calculated over an appropriate time interval, typically twelve months.

6.7 If a comparative ethical claim of improvement is made, the ethical claim shall be specific and make clear the basis for the comparison. In particular, the ethical claim shall be relevant in terms of how recently any improvement was made.

7 Requirements for presentation

7.1 Ethical claims shall be presented in a manner that reflects the scope of the ethical claim and, where an aspect of the product, service, process or organization is not included, this shall be stated in the ethical claim or in the explanatory statement.

7.2 Explanatory statements shall be included where necessary to ensure that the meaning of an ethical claim is not misunderstood by the intended audience (see 9.6).

7.3 Ethical claims shall be presented in a manner that clearly indicates that the ethical claim and explanatory statement should be read together. The explanatory statement shall be of reasonable size and in reasonable proximity to the ethical claim it accompanies.

7.4 The use of different terminology to imply multiple benefits shall be avoided.

7.5 To increase understanding of the ethical claim, the person or organization declaring it shall facilitate communication with the intended audience, particularly consumers.

NOTE For details on requirements for point of sale presentation and other information requirements, see [Clause 9](#).

7.6 Ethical claims shall include instructions about how to access the supporting information.

NOTE Suitable links to supporting information can include a link to a website or quick response (QR) code.

8 Supporting data

8.1 The supporting data shall substantiate the scope, principles, assumptions and boundary conditions (e.g. temporal, geographical or physical) of the claim. This shall be sufficient and comprehensible to allow users, potential users and other interested parties to evaluate claims in terms of scientific principles, relevance and overall validity, and to assess whether a claim is consistent with the applicable standards.

8.2 The methods used to collect data to support an ethical claim shall be appropriate to the claim and shall provide information that is relevant, verifiable, accurate and repeatable.

8.3 These methods should follow recognized standards that have international acceptability. These can include international, regional or national standards. These could also include industry or trade methods which have been subjected to peer review, where such standards or methods exist.

8.4 Where the person or organization developing or declaring the ethical claim has classified supporting data as confidential, the body that performed the verification of the claim shall be identified.

8.5 The relevant life cycle stages that have been included in the evaluation shall be documented in the supporting data.

8.6 Ethical claims related to product origin shall have a traceability system in place that is transparent and suitable.

NOTE For details on supply chain requirements, see [Clause 10](#).

8.7 There shall be a periodic review of the supporting data for an ethical claim in order to account for innovation, experience gathered or change in circumstances. Information should be gathered at a frequency consistent with the pace of innovation.

9 Point of sale and supporting information

9.1 General

9.1.1 Ethical claims at point of sale shall be provided with access to information so that the user can understand the meaning of any claim, symbol or term. This can be accomplished through various means, such as advertising, explanatory panels at the retail level, free telephone numbers, QR codes and education programmes, among others.

9.1.2 The ethical claim shall be placed at the point of sale to allow an informed and timely decision. This can be provided in, but not limited to, the following options:

- a) a statement, symbol or graphic on the main body of the product or the packaging;
- b) instruction manuals, catalogues, product literature, technical bulletins;
- c) advertising, publicity, media marketing, displayed at the point of sale, or placed on websites.

9.1.3 The point of sale information provided shall be accessible, appropriate and sufficient to the nature and scope of the ethical claim being made.

9.1.4 All on-product ethical claims shall be accompanied by an accessible reference providing information that explains the claim and identifies the method of verification.

NOTE Various complementary and different communication channels can be used in order to address different user groups.

9.2 Point of sale information

9.2.1 The ethical claim shall include the following information at point of sale:

- a) a clear indication of the scope of the ethical claim and identification of the life cycle stages that are covered by the ethical claim;
- b) the object to which the ethical claim refers;
- c) an unambiguous indication (e.g. a link to a website or a QR code) of how to access the supporting information, which can be on a website, at the point of sale or any other publicly available communication medium;
- d) a clear indication of whether the ethical claim is self-declared or is based on independent verification;

NOTE Ethical claims prepared in accordance with this document can be verified. ISO/IEC 17029 contains general principles and requirements for the competence, consistent operation and impartiality of bodies providing validation/verification as conformity assessment. Bodies operating according to ISO/IEC 17029 can be first-party, second-party or third-party bodies and do not need to offer both validation and verification activities. ISO/IEC 17029 is applicable to validation/verification bodies in any sector, providing assurance through confirmation that claims are either plausible with regard to the intended purpose (validation) or correctly stated (verification).

- e) where the ethical claim is produced within a programme, identification of the programme operator.

9.2.2 Where there is any possibility for the ethical claim to be misunderstood, it shall be accompanied by an explanatory statement.

9.2.3 Words, numbers or graphics used for other purposes shall not be used in a manner that is likely to be misunderstood as being part of an ethical claim.

9.3 Use of graphics

9.3.1 When an ethical claim is made, the use of a graphic is optional.

9.3.2 When graphics are used in an ethical claim:

- a) words and numbers shall be used in addition to graphics to communicate information about the ethical claim;
- b) words and numbers used with an ethical claim shall be presented in a manner that clearly indicates that the information is intended to be read together;
- c) words and numbers used with the ethical claim graphic shall be legible and located close to the graphic;
- d) numbers used as part of an ethical claim graphic shall represent significant values;
- e) ethical claims shall avoid the use of a symbol or design to convey the nature of the ethical claim if it could be misinterpreted as relating to a different ethical aspect;
- f) ethical claims shall avoid the use of a symbol or design, which could be misinterpreted with regards to product certification.

9.3.3 Graphics shall be simple and capable of being positioned and sized to suit the product to which the graphic is likely to be applied, while retaining clarity and legibility. They shall be easily distinguishable from other graphics used for other purposes.

9.3.4 Graphics used for one type of ethical claim should be easily distinguishable from graphics for other ethical claims.

9.4 Point of sale information for comparative ethical claims within an organization

9.4.1 An ethical claim that identifies an improvement shall include at the point of sale:

- a) qualitative and quantitative information, and
- b) an explanatory statement.

9.4.2 Ethical claims that make comparisons or state that there has been improvement shall be clearly distinguished from other ethical claims and shall not be misleading.

9.4.3 An ethical claim based on tracking the performance of a specific product, service, process or organization shall provide a quantification of the difference between the object under study and the baseline product.

9.5 Supporting information

9.5.1 Supporting information shall include at a minimum:

- a) information about any verification of conformance with this document that has been undertaken;

NOTE Any applicable programme can further specify how the verification of claims can be undertaken.

- b) definitions of rated scales and colour or letter codes, if used;
- c) the date of publication;
- d) date of expiration or period of validity, where relevant;
- e) identification of the life cycle stages that are covered by the ethical claim.

9.5.2 The information required in [9.5.1](#) a) to e) shall be easily accessible and free of charge and obligation.

9.5.3 All supporting information shall be made accessible by print, electronic or other media, either at the point of sale or via a web link or similar communication channels.

9.6 Use of explanatory statements

9.6.1 Explanatory statements shall be included at the point of sale, where necessary, to ensure that the meaning of the ethical claim is not misunderstood by the intended audience.

9.6.2 An explanatory statement forms part of the ethical claim and shall be presented in a manner that clearly indicates that it is intended to be read together with the ethical claim. It shall be of reasonable size and in reasonable proximity to the ethical claim.

NOTE Such an explanatory statement can be brief and refer the user to supporting information.

10 Traceability and the supply chain

10.1 Supporting data for the ethical claim shall include a traceability system to ensure that all aspects of the product, service, process or organization that are included in the scope of the ethical claim are documented throughout the portion of the supply chain that is included in that scope.

10.2 The traceability system shall be commensurate with the scope of the ethical claim made and shall be able to provide a rationale for its choice of structure and activities (see [Annex A](#)).

NOTE Traceability underpins the transparency and reliability of the ethical claim and provides interested parties with assurance that the identity of the product, process or service, is maintained throughout the supply chain.

11 Ethical labelling programmes

11.1 Where ethical claims are produced within a programme, the scope of the programme shall be clear and shall define whether or not the programme is limited, for example, to a certain geographical area or to certain industrial sectors, products or groups of products. This information shall be transparent and communicated.

11.2 For programmes, requirements shall be expressed in terms of performance rather than design or descriptive characteristics. This approach leaves maximum flexibility for technical or other innovation. Prescriptive design criteria or implicit preference for a technology shall be avoided because of the possibility of restricting or discouraging improvements in products or services which do not affect conformance to applicable criteria or which could lead to significant improvement.

Annex A (informative)

Traceability systems

A.1 [Clause 10](#) requires ethical claims to demonstrate traceability. This annex provides a list of items appropriate to a traceability system. Another document that can be of assistance is ISO 22005.

A.2 In the design of a traceability system the items listed below should be considered by the organization.

a) Objectives and scope

The organization should identify relevant products, components or other elements that are part of the scope of the ethical claim.

b) Products, components or ingredients

The organization should identify its suppliers and customers.

c) Flow of materials

The organization should determine the flow of materials within its control.

d) Information requirements

The organization should determine the information:

- to be obtained from its suppliers;
- to be collected concerning the process history;
- to be provided to its customers.

e) Procedures

The organization should establish procedures for documenting the flow of products, materials and information including document retention and verification. The procedures should include at least the following:

- definition of the scope of the ethical claim;
- evidence of origin, including the originators description of characteristics of the products, components or other elements that are relevant to the ethical claim;
- evidence of conditions during transportation, including segregation where relevant to the ethical claim;
- documentation of the flow of materials including the media requirements for this documentation;
- management plan for the data;
- system for retrieval of the information for communication.

f) Documentation

The organization should determine which documents are required to achieve the objectives of its traceability system. Appropriate documentation can include for example:

- description of the relevant steps in the chain;
- description of the responsibilities for the management of data;
- written or recorded information documenting the activities and manufacturing process flows and results of verification and audits;
- documentation addressing action taken to manage non-conformity related to the established traceability system;
- document retention times.

A.3 The organization should review the traceability system at appropriate intervals or whenever changes are made to the product service, process or organization. Examples for this review include:

- test results;
- audit findings;
- changes to product or processes;
- information provided by other organizations in the supply chain;
- corrective actions;
- customer feedback including complaints;
- new or amended regulations or standards.

A.4 Internal audits should be performed at planned intervals to assess the effectiveness of the traceability system to meet the established objectives for each ethical claim.