

Environmental Tools:

Environmental Report Cards

What are environmental report cards?

Environmental report cards rate products or operations according to various criteria. These profiles are based on a cradle to grave assessment of the environmental burdens associated with the raw material, extraction, manufacture, transportation, use, and disposal of a product. Report cards may also rate actions from a company, a sector or even government agency. Environmental report cards provide environmental feedback, recommendations for improvement and list environmental progress/achievements for a particular product, operation or sector.

Examples

[Scientific Certification System \(SCS\) Certified Eco-Profile Labeling System](#)

The SCS's Report card was introduced in 1993. The report card provides a quantified summary of the resources used and emissions associated with a product system. This system has consumer and industrial applications and has evolved into the Eco-profile, which links the quantified resources and emissions of a product back to the specific environment where release occurs.

[Sierra Club of Canada's Report Card on International Obligations](#)

For over twelve years, the Sierra Club has collaborated with other environmental and development groups across Canada in researching, writing and grading environmental performance on various issues such as: biodiversity, climate change, toxic chemicals, and pollution for the federal, provincial and territorial governments.

Applications

Report cards are used to provide information to the public on the lifecycle of a product, environmental performances of an organization or elected officials, and can record and share public concerns on environmental issues.

Tool performance:

Pros

- Provides information to empower the public about environmental matters.
- Report cards require minimal resources to develop and distribute and can be completed in a short amount of time (three to six months).
- Media coverage on environmental performance is becoming easier to obtain.
- The general public can easily understand environmental report cards as they share many similar characteristics to educational report cards.
- It offers room for improvement by offering suggestions rather than just criticizing behavior.

Cons

- Finding and accessing a particular report card may be difficult.
- They may fail to accurately capture the severity of risks associated with various environmental issues.
- Consumers may misinterpret the report card as an endorsement of a product or company.
- Some companies request report cards for internal use rather than for marketing purposes, therefore may not provide the public access to information.

Special considerations:

There are many steps in the development an effective report card that requires adequate internal and external resources. Here is a series of basic steps to create a report card:

1. Find the right people to develop the report card;
2. Carefully pick the product line or area that you want the report to focus on;
3. Outline a set of issues;
4. Research;
5. Compile data;
6. Summarize the data;
7. Choose the top issues;
8. Create a draft; and,
9. Finalize the report card
10. Once the report card is complete, share it and make it accessible to the public.