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Low impact ecodesign

Cost reduction and environmental friendliness go side by side. The Chamber of Commerce and Industry encourages small and medium enterprises of the construction sector to join the project that European Commission created for developing eco-friendly EDECON products, designed to raise environmental awareness of the companies and increase efficiency of their products and services. "The goal of the EDECON project is raising environmental awareness of small and medium-sized companies, including architects, manufacturers of materials and integrated furniture, as well as builders", said Kadri Rist, the project manager of the Chamber of Commerce and Industry.

During the program, the participants will be familiarized with the notion of eco-design and its role in the construction sector, they will also be given some practical advice, as well as an overview of all the possibilities that allow companies to weigh the impact of a product or a service on the environment throughout its entire life cycle. Then eco-design strategies helping to control the impact on the environment will be singled out. According to Rist, by applying the principles of eco-design we can reduce the costs.

"Reducing the product weight while preserving its functionality will allow to lower raw materials and transport costs", she gave an example. It is also expected that companies will pay more attention to environmental management. "Most of the big European construction companies, retailers, communication companies, institutions and government agencies require from their suppliers and subcontractors conformation of environmental management implementation", - explained Rist, she also added that companies often have to change their business models in order to meet heightened demands of their customers. "Environmental friendliness and decision to use new models in order to get products and services to meet the specific requirements of customers allowed some companies to increase profits by changing the business model," said Rist. Moreover, most principles of eco-design are based on laws - regulations and directives of the European Union which must be followed by all the companies.

A year to implement the changes.

Tarmo Täht, a consultant of the Christiansen Consulting OÜ company that offers free consultation on eco-design as a part of the program, recommends joining the program to those who are looking to increase their environmental awareness and their popularity among customers by being known as an environment-friendly company. Those who want to make their product or service more eco-friendly and increase its efficiency throughout the whole life cycle, should also take part in it. According Täht, during a consultation the environmental impact of the product or service is estimated, recorded and analyzed in order to determine at what stage of its life cycle you can take measures to reduce the environmental impact. "After the first visit, the company can request a free detailed audit. Throughout this audit they develop the action and budget plans for a pre-selected stage of the product life cycle during which it is preferable to change the design of a product or a service. The company has a year from the day of the meeting to implement the measures specified by the plan," - said Täht. Speaking of the most necessary measures, Täht mentioned two spheres: transportation and distribution design, and manufacture design. According to him, those areas require the most immediate and direct changes.

Companies have something learn.

By Täht's estimate, construction companies are usually aware of the environmental impact of their products and services. "Yet such values are usually shown by professionals and companies that have implemented the environmental management system ISO 14001," - he admitted. According Täht, Estonian companies can be distinguished from medium and small companies in Western Europe by three factors: less innovative services, products and processes, unreadiness to cooperate and marketing too slow to offer their services to the widest possible range of customers. This also applies to environmental activities.

Experience of Eskaro: packaging weight reduction helps to lower transport costs.

PWM manufacturer Eskaro, a subsidiary company of the Swedish concern Eskaro Grupp AB in Estonia, also took part in the EDECON project. According to Anni Turro, the representative of the director Edward Shtivelman, the decision to participate in the program was made without hesitation. "Since one of the main goals of the program is to increase the environmental awareness, promotion and implementation of eco-design, it was easy for our company to make a decision about joining the program, - said Turro. - We constantly control our manufacturing process to make sure it is absolutely eco-friendly. One of our products has a European eco-label, an eco-flower, which shows our consumers that this product is more environment-friendly and reliable than analogous products because it was evaluated by the third party. "

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According to Turro, together with the consultants the company created a life cycle map for one of the products, which allowed all employees review the environmental impact of this product, beginning with the choice of raw materials, production, packaging, painting and ending with waste. Now the company is planning on creating such maps for other groups of products and applying the principles of eco-design to them. Moreover, detailed audit took place during the program, which resulted into the decision to make a change in shipping and distribution of products. "The goal was to reduce the package weight if there is a chance to use alternative materials that are safer for the environment. We have made calculations on the use of plastic containers instead of the metal ones. It helped us save about 3 tons of materials within a year," - specified Turro. According to Turro, reducing the package weight helped to lower truck loading and costs of transportation. The lower the transport costs - the lower the energy consumption and air pollution. Packaging costs also were reduced. Turro recommends the program to other companies. According to her, it is important to know how products affect the environment at a particular stage of the life cycle and how we can reduce this impact.

Stages of the product life cycle.

1. Procurement/production of raw materials. For instance: extraction of materials for cement, oil refining for making plastic or wood procurement for woodwork. This stage can be viewed as a part of the production process by compilers of the construction products components.
2. Transport. Transportation of materials from the source to the factory door may include packing materials and a kind of transport - by sea, by car, by train or air.
3. Manufacture. It covers all the processes associated with manufacturing: from submission of raw materials to shipping finished products from your territory. The type and quantity of packed products.
4. Packaging. The type and amount of used packaging.
5. Distribution. Distance and ways of shipping from your gate to the customer (depending on the business model, it can be a construction site, a construction materials dealer or a final consumer).
6. Usage. Product usage: such as consumption of water or electricity, "active" products or services, for example the amount of electric equipment or issuing volume of "passive" products (such as paints and adhesives). This stage may include installation and maintenance; such work as painting the surface of wooden items or maintenance of the mechanical ones.
7. The end of the life cycle. The process includes taking care of services or products, life cycle of which came to an end. For example: pipes, wires, boards, windows, wall coverings.

Ecodesign or ecological design, implicates integration of environmental factors into the design and development of a product or a service in order to increase its efficiency throughout the life cycle. In the construction sector it implies a significant impact on society and quality of life - more than half the materials extracted from the earth (over 3 billion tons in the EU alone) is used in construction; buildings take up to 42% of all the consumed energy and are responsible for up to 35% of all the greenhouse gas in the EU.

Advantages of ecodesign. Lower costs. Reducing product weight while maintaining its functionality allows lowering the cost of raw materials and transportation. For example, reinforced steel girders take 25-50% less steel than ordinary ones. Developing the product in a way that makes it easy to disassemble in the end of the life cycle can also reduce costs.

Meeting customers' expectations. Most of the big European construction companies, retailers, communication companies, institutions and government agencies require from their suppliers and subcontractors conformation of environmental management implementation.

Willingness to follow the laws. Many principles of ecodesign are based on the European Union laws - regulations and directives that must be followed by all the companies. Ability to make plans and

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readiness for potential changes in laws will help to gain more profit in the changed conditions on the market.

New business models. Environmental friendliness allows increasing profit by changing the business model and bringing products and services in line with specific requirements of the customers.

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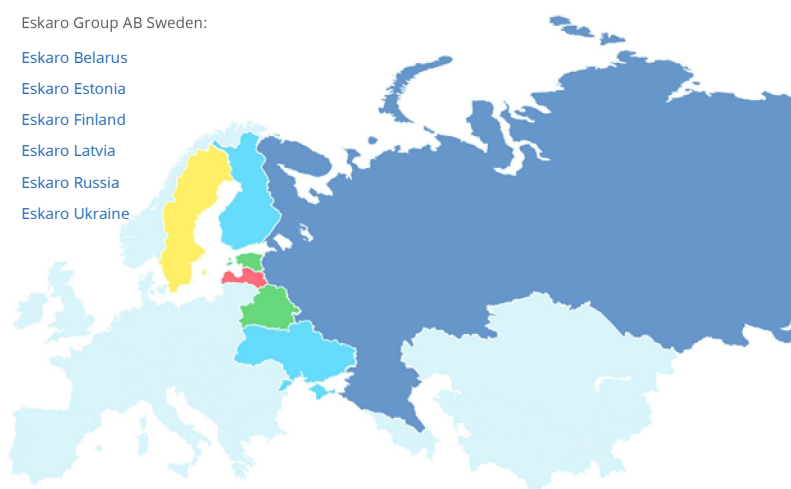
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