



First green gym out of red zone

On 20 April 2012, on the outside edge of the Christchurch red zone, the Minister for the Environment, Hon Amy Adams, attended the official opening of the country's first fitness centre to pass assessment by Environmental Choice New Zealand, the government-owned eco-label. It is the re-opened Les Mills Christchurch gym in Cashel Street.

Although over 2500 products are already proven and endorsed green (environmentally better) by Environmental Choice, this is only the third "service" to be granted the planet-and-tick symbol, following a rigorous assessment process. The fact that it is in central Christchurch makes it even more of a milestone, says Environmental Choice general manager Robin Taylor.

"The initiative taken by Les Mills, supported by the industry body Fitness New Zealand, encouraged the eco-label to push up the pace when finalising its new fitness centre specification. Les Mills sprang into action and I'm pleased they are the first to pass our fitness test."

The seal is granted to individual gyms, as it investigates their unique single site operation. The specification tests how well a gym performs in areas including energy and water use, green purchasing, the type and use of cleaning materials, and consumption of resources generally.

Within a fitness centre there are many areas where environmental impact can be considered: the composition of exercise mats, use of recycled PVC or virgin rubber on equipment, what dumbbells are made from, and the coatings on steel for adjustable benches are some examples. In modern fitness centres, the selection and use of electronics and machinery also offers opportunity to make decisions that are better for the environment, in such areas as sound, video, and office equipment with less environmental impact, says Robin Taylor. Overseas, he comments, some exercise machinery actually generates electricity either to minimise consumption or potentially even feed back energy into the grid.

Around nine percent of New Zealanders hold a gym membership, says Robin Taylor. "Fitness centre clients are focussed on health and wellbeing, and so this is an ideal area for the country's eco-label to be involved. It will also create educational opportunities for increasing the awareness of environmental impacts, as health and the environment are so strongly linked."

The CEO of Les Mills, Reece Zondag, says: "As a company we have been working hard for a number of years on reducing our impact on the environment. The Environmental Choice achievement is a formal acknowledgement of the hard work and commitment by everyone in the company to minimise the effect we have on our planet and our immediate environment. We're extremely proud that Les Mills Christchurch is the first fitness centre in the country to achieve this significant milestone. It is somewhat fitting considering everything our staff, members and the city itself have been through. We are also very excited about the movement towards certification for all of our clubs, and our ongoing goal is to educate and encourage our members to take personal responsibility and steps to minimise their own impact on the environment".

CEO of Fitness NZ, Richard Beddie, is calling for his industry to get fully involved in expanding the number of environmental gyms. "Sustainability is a growing focus for all businesses, and fitness is certainly no exception. Fitness NZ encourages all its members to visit the Environmental Choice New Zealand website and see how well they step up to the bar. Best practice operators can only gain by becoming a certified green fitness centre."

Elements for the specification have been drawn from a worldwide body of information through other members of the Global Ecolabelling Network, and organisations as diverse as the EU, Green Globe, University of California, NZ Green Building Council, and the US Environmental Protection Agency. The research has then been considered for its relevance to New Zealand.

"The specification should encourage those in charge of designing, constructing and operating fitness centres to seriously plan for healthy indoor environments in the way that Les Mills has done in Christchurch," says Robin Taylor. "This initiative will show that measurable, sustainable practices can be built into everyday indoor fitness studios and gyms."

More information from Michael Hooper, communications adviser to Environmental Choice New Zealand. Phone (021) 940 893. Email: spotlightmedia@clear.net.nz. www.environmentalchoice.org.nz. Or contact Blair Wolfgram, Manager of Property & Facilities, Les Mills, Phone (0275) 615 900. Also Richard Beddie, Fitness NZ, phone (027) 520 5744. Email: richard@fitnessnz.co.nz.