

Business, NGO Leaders Team Up For Greener Chemicals, Materials

By Jonathan Bardelline

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More than 50 leaders from businesses and non-governmental organizations have come together to focus on making consumer products less toxic and with sustainable ingredients.

Today the [Business-NGO Working Group for Safer Chemicals and Sustainable Materials](#) launches with the release of its "[Guiding Principles for Chemicals Policy.](#)"

"First we want to say where we want to go. That is the guiding principles," said Mark Rossi, research director for [Clean Production Action](#), which spearheaded the group's creation. "Then we'll figure out how we will get there."

The working group is encouraging companies and their supply chains to adopt its guiding principles on chemicals (reproduced in full below), which call for disclosing chemical ingredients, avoiding hazardous chemicals, creating a framework for reviewing chemicals and supporting appropriate policies and standards. The details of how each step will be implemented will be the focus of coming discussions as the group creates options, strategies and tools for each principle.

"What do we mean when we talk about disclosure?" Rossi said. "Our initial thinking that got captured in the guiding principles is there will be a willingness to disclose chemicals of high concern." But that could mean manufacturers informing companies what is in the chemicals they are providing, companies listing all substances in a product on its label or providing detailed information on a website. "At a minimum, there is laying out these different options," Rossi said.

The working group is also developing guidelines for identifying and selecting materials that are sustainable throughout their creation, production, use and end of life. The group is first focusing on bioplastics, particularly biobased food service items like plates and utensils. The group is surveying bioplastic item vendors about the lifecycles of their products, how they can be disposed of and other details. In about six months, Rossi said, the group hopes to release recommended purchasing specifications for bioplastic items.

The working group has been in development over the past two years, starting in October 2006 with 22 representatives from environmental organizations and the electronics, health care, building and retail industries.

Individuals, not companies, are considered participants of the working group, which so far includes representatives of businesses, NGOs, health care organizations and investors

such as Seventh Generation, Dell, Kaiser Permanente, Hospira, Construction Specialties, True Textiles, Heath Care Without Harm, Institute for Agriculture and Trade Policy, ChemSec, Whole Foods Market and the Electronic Take Back Coalition.

Large entities like Kaiser Permanente, a health care product purchaser, and Hospira, a producer of health care items, will be key to making large strides. "They can drive change up their supply chain," Rossi said.

The Guiding Principles for Chemicals Policy are:

1. Know and disclose product chemistry. Manufacturers will identify the substances associated with and used in a product across its lifecycle and will increase as appropriate the transparency of the chemical constituents in their products, including the public disclosure of chemicals of high concern. Buyers will request product chemistry data from their suppliers.
2. Assess and avoid hazards. Manufacturers will determine the hazard characteristics of chemical constituents and formulations in their products, use chemicals with inherently low hazard potential, prioritize chemicals of high concern for elimination, minimize exposure when hazards cannot be prevented, and redesign products and processes to avoid the use and/or generation of hazardous chemicals. Buyers will work with their suppliers to achieve this principle.
3. Commit to continuous improvement. Establish corporate governance structures, policies and practices that create a framework for the regular review of product and process chemistry, and that promote the use of chemicals, processes, and products with inherently lower hazard potential.
4. Support public policies and industry standards that: advance the implementation of the above three principles, ensure that comprehensive hazard data are available for chemicals on the market, take action to eliminate or reduce known hazards and promote a greener economy, including support for green chemistry research and education.

Source URL: <http://www.greenerdesign.com/news/2008/10/29/greener-chemicals-materials>

Links:

[1] <http://busngoworkgroup.org/about.php>

[2] <http://busngoworkgroup.org/guidingPrinciples.php>

[3] <http://www.cleanproduction.org/Home.php>