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Groundbreaking chemicals policy principles

On Wednesday, October 29 the Business-NGO Working Group for Safer Chemicals and Sustainable Materials will have its public launch after two years of behind-the-scenes planning. Spearheaded by the nonprofit environmental organization Clean Production Action, the group consists of business and NGO leaders who are creating a roadmap to the widespread use of safer chemicals in consumer products.

As a first step the Working Group will release a joint statement entitled "Guiding Principles for Chemicals Policy," which outlines a path for businesses to implement greener and safer chemicals. This came in response to the increasing demand from consumers, investors and governments for chemicals that have low to no toxicity and degrade into innocuous substances in the environment. Leading businesses are seeking to capture these emerging market opportunities by redesigning their products and catalyzing change in their supply chains.

"The Guiding Principles for Chemicals Policy mark a significant step toward incorporating green chemistry into consumer goods," said Roger McFadden, Vice President of Product Science and Technology and Chief Science Officer, Corporate Express, A Staples Company. "Companies who sign on are demonstrating a commitment to creating products that are better for public health and the environment."

Other participants in the Business-NGO Working Group include: Kaiser Permanente, Hospira, Construction Specialties, True Textiles, and Catholic Healthcare West; along with NGOs such as Health Care Without Harm, Healthy Building Network, Institute for Agriculture and Trade Policy, Institute for Local Self-Reliance and ChemSec. A complete list of participants and details on the Guiding Principles for Chemicals Policy will be available at www.BusNGOWorkGroup.org on October 29.

"Kaiser Permanente has had a long standing focus on the provisioning of products that have less of an environmental impact than those containing chemicals of high concern," said Dean Edwards, VP and Chief Procurement Officer at Kaiser Permanente. "We are proud to support the Business-NGO Working Group."

Twenty two organizations from the environmental community and the electronics, health care, building and retail sectors launched the Working Group in October 2006 in Boston.

The Working Group's mission is: To promote the creation and adoption of safer chemicals and sustainable materials in a way that supports market transitions to a healthy economy, healthy environment, and healthy people.

The group's objectives include:

- Modeling a new type and degree of collaboration between NGOs and businesses working together to accelerate the transition to a safer, healthy economy.
- Crafting a "transition agenda" for moving away from petro-based materials to sustainable biobased/bioderived materials.
- Developing tools and continuous improvement criteria for moving to safer chemicals and sustainable materials.
- Advancing policy initiatives that accelerate the development and use of safer chemicals and sustainable materials.
- Transforming markets to safer chemicals and sustainable markets by, for example, aligning purchasing criteria across sectors.

"For too long it has been assumed that environmental organizations and businesses work in opposition to each other," said Mark Rossi, Research Director for Clean Production Action. "The Guiding Principles for Chemicals Policy prove that businesses and NGOs can collaborate in developing a visionary agenda."

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