

Background Information

Greening Government Operations: an Agenda for Cooperation

A key topic on the G-7 Environment Ministers' agenda is greening government -- how governments can factor environmental concerns more effectively into their operations and decision making.

The greening of government operations has financial as well as environmental benefits:

- * National governments are among the largest single businesses in each country, and their commitment to "buy green" and to environmentally sound management of their operations has enormous economic clout. According to International Monetary Fund figures, national governments account for between 9% and 21% of their country's total consumption. The federal government is Canada's largest single business, it employs more than half a million people, has over 22 million hectares of land under direct management, and spends more than \$8 billion annually on goods and services.
- * By greening their operations, governments support the growth of the environment industry -- an important sector in many national economies.
- * Savings achieved through governments' conservation of energy, water and materials are "green" dividends that can be applied to other important programs and services.
- * Environmentally sound government investments and development not only protect vital natural resources for the future, but also reduce the need for costly environmental clean-ups and restoration.
- * By setting an example of environmentally responsible management, governments are in a stronger position to encourage and assist the private sector to do likewise.

Among the G-7 nations, greening government involves many activities, including:

- * conserving energy and materials, and reducing waste in the construction and renovation of buildings and facilities.
- * preventing pollution and conserving energy, water and materials in day-to-day operations.

- purchasing less environmentally harmful products and services, such as those identified under various eco-labelling programs,
- reducing and managing environmental risks arising from previous decisions and future risks to health and the environment associated with the use of different chemicals, and
- managing government owned and -leased lands in an environmentally sound manner

Governments are using a range of tools and techniques to further these efforts, including technical assistance, codes of practice, financial incentives, awards programs, targets, public reporting, and fines and other legal sanctions

By exchanging ideas and comparing practices, each government can improve its own environmental performance. At the Hamilton meeting, G-7 Environment Ministers will have an opportunity to share information on the ways in which each is successfully greening its own operations.

The following examples illustrate some recent green initiatives by the G-7 governments

CANADA

Commissioner of the Environment and Sustainable Development

Legislation was tabled on April 25, 1995, to provide for the creation of a Commissioner of the Environment and Sustainable Development in the Office of the Auditor General. The legislation would require Ministers to develop sustainable development strategies for their departments, including measurable goals and targets. The Commissioner would audit departments' progress towards achieving those goals and targets and would report annually to the House of Commons on the results

Federal Buildings Initiative helps save energy

Natural Resources Canada's Federal Buildings Initiative helps the government to improve the energy efficiency of its 50,000 buildings across Canada. Departments can achieve energy reductions of 15 to 20 per cent, for total savings of up to \$100 million per year. For example, Public Works and Government Services Canada undertook lighting retrofits at nine buildings, the initial investment of \$76,000 has yielded annual savings of \$185,000.

Electronic forms save trees and money

Industry Canada has introduced a system of electronic forms to replace printed forms. The department estimates that it has saved more than \$181,000 in the first two years of using the system -- a 55-per-cent return on its original research and development investment.

House of Commons goes green

The House of Commons "Greening the Hill" program has diverted almost 80 per cent of the Hill's garbage from landfills. Between 1990 and 1994, 3,200 metric tonnes of paper were recycled, generating revenue of over \$85,000.

U.S.A.

Waste reduction at federal sites

Under an initiative to help prevent pollution and reduce waste -- the Waste Reduction Evaluations at Federal Sites (WREAFS) Program -- federal agencies cooperate with the Environmental Protection Agency in conducting on-site evaluations and demonstrations. At one Department of Defense site, recycling and re-use projects have achieved an annual waste reduction of more than 232,000 pounds and net savings of U.S.\$149,400 in operating costs, on an initial investment of U.S.\$34,000.

"Green Lights" for savings

The "Green Lights" initiative is a voluntary pollution-prevention program whereby an organization (such as a government agency, university, hospital or company) agrees to survey its domestic facilities and upgrade the lighting, where it is profitable to do so, within five years. The Environmental Protection Agency provides information on technology and guidance on financing options. In one example, a public institution upgraded its lighting at a cost of U.S.\$85,446 and achieved annual savings of more than U.S.\$102,000. The environmental benefits in terms of pollution prevention total more than 3 million pounds of CO₂, 11 million grams of SO_x, and 5 million grams of NO_x per year.

Army minimizes hazardous wastes

The U.S. Army has developed a comprehensive hazardous waste minimization program that includes efforts to replace hazardous materials with safer substitutes, to recover and re-use byproducts, and to track potential hazardous wastes.

ITALY

Italian government undertakes a range of green initiatives

The Italian government has been greening its operations since at least 1987 when comprehensive protocols of intent were signed between the Minister of the Environment and the Ministers of Defence and of Public Instruction.

Also in 1987, the State Supply Office began to use recycled paper, reaching 60% of the total more recently. Subsequent steps have included the environmental impact assessment of public projects (1988); funding for environmental plans and programs of state organizations (1989), a voluntary program of waste reduction and recycling (1990); and targets for purchasing to environmental standards (1991).

In 1993, the Italian Parliament approved the establishment of a National Environmental Protection Agency to promote environmental research, collect and disseminate data, provide technical support for developing environmental standards, and conduct environmental monitoring.

Environmental assessment of high-speed rail project

The Italian government is undertaking an ambitious pollution prevention effort as one aspect of a high-speed rail project. Thirteen hundred kilometres of new track is involved, along the Milan-Naples and Turin-Venice lines. A detailed environmental profile is being prepared of the whole right of way, and the government is engaging local communities in discussions of the project's environmental impacts and possible mitigation activities.

GERMANY

Massive environmental clean-up under way

In recent years, environmental efforts in Germany have focused on a vast clean-up and rehabilitation program following the Unification Treaty of August 1990. Through the Treuhandanstalt or Treuhand, a trust fund formed in that year, the Federal Republic acquired ownership of nearly all the state enterprises and land in the former German Democratic Republic. The twin aims of the Treuhand are to privatize enterprises while improving their competitiveness, and to create jobs up to the point that they are privatized. This is the largest such operation in history, and has major environmental implications. Some 100,000 environment-related public service jobs have been created. Total estimates of the environmental remediation work required range from 82.8 to 321.3 billion Deutschemarks, with a most likely estimate of 211.4 billion.

UNITED KINGDOM

Action guide assists managers

In 1990, the U.K. government published Our Common Inheritance, a comprehensive "white paper" with specific references to decisions by individual government departments on property management and purchasing. The government owns some 8,000 properties and spends about £7 billion each year on goods and services.

The Department of the Environment's Property Holdings organization has produced an environmental action guide to assist managers in assessing the environmental impact of their units' operations and identifying options for improvement.

FRANCE

Wide focus for greening activities

France established an Environment and Energy Conservation Agency in 1990, the same year in which it released its "Plan national pour l'environnement." The agency is funded by the state and by various taxes, levies and charges paid by polluters, and is used to co-finance environmental projects. One of the main tasks of this agency is to promote energy savings, especially in public buildings.

France's greening government activities currently focus on: purchasing policies and practices; waste reduction and recycling; building energy systems and operations; environmental assessments of public projects; remediation of contaminated sites, and education and environmental citizenship.

COMMISSION OF THE EUROPEAN COMMUNITIES

European Commission monitors its own operations

In 1990, the European Commission published a Green Paper on ecological aspects of its operations. The paper identified various areas to be monitored, including energy consumption, the recycling of computers, use of environmentally responsible products in the construction and maintenance of buildings, and the inclusion of an ecology statement in all contracts.

More recently the Commission has undertaken an ambitious program to reduce the consumption of paper and promote the use of recycled paper.

JAPAN

Environment Plan considers government's impact on environment

In November 1993, Japan introduced a Basic Environment Law, which was followed in December 1994 by a Basic Environment Plan. Both strengthened Japan's commitment in the area of environmental protection. The Plan established a series of principles to guide the activities of private corporations. The principles also apply to central and local governments, since these also have roles as producers and consumers. An Action Plan for Greening Government Operations is being established for the government as a whole, focusing on the acquisition and use of goods and services, the construction and management of buildings and their energy efficiency, the reduction of energy use and waste in offices, and environmental education and training for employees.

(Également disponible en français)