



October 19, 2010

US EPA/OPPT
1201 Constitution Ave., NW.
Washington, DC 20229

Attention: Docket ID Number EPA-HQ-OPPT-2010-0768

EPA's Role in Advancing "Green" or Sustainable Products

Thank you for requesting comments on the important topic of what EPA's role should be in advancing sustainable products and services.

With the significant rise in “green” claims by product manufacturers and distributors, government agencies, institutions, businesses and ordinary consumers are facing a confusing array of standards, eco-labels and recommendations. Below is a list of actions EPA could take to make a meaningful contribution to the development of standards guiding the manufacture, designation, use, and end-of-life management of sustainable products and services:

- EPA should take a role similar to that of the Environmental Commission of the EU and establish minimum “eco-design” standards for products that can be sold in the United States. Currently, nearly any product can be sold – no matter how toxic, wasteful or harmful it is throughout its life-cycle.
- Specifically, EPA could establish limits (under the Toxic Substances Control Act) on the toxic chemical content of products sold in the US. By doing so, it would mirror the actions of the EU under the its Restriction on Hazardous Substances (RoHS) Directive. See revised RoHS limits: <http://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=OJ:L:2010:251:0028:0034:EN:PDF>.
- EPA should help the Federal Trade Commission (FTC) in ensuring compliance with regulations that are designed to prevent product manufacturers and distributors from making false claims about the environmental benefits of their products and to ensure that products are properly labeled.
- EPA should continue its important role providing technical assistance to companies that are interested in reformulating their product(s) to become more sustainable (or at least continue providing funding for private sector organizations that can provide this service). Conversely, EPA should not compete with independent, third-party organizations by developing “green” standards for goods and services. For example, while EPA’s Design for the Environment program should help prepare individual manufacturers for becoming certified by independent third party organizations, it should not develop its own standards, which could change with political winds, budget issues, etc. It is particularly important for EPA to avoid establishing product rating programs in which the environmental claims are not verified or the standards were not developed in an open and participatory process.



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- EPA should update and expand its Comprehensive Procurement Guidelines (CPGs) and product guides, which are used by federal agencies and serve as a model for states and municipalities. The CPGs and related product guides do not appear to have been updated substantially for at least three years (see <http://www.epa.gov/epawaste/conservation/tools/cpg/factsheets.htm>). Without current information, government purchasing agents are unable to make decisions based on current market conditions.
- Because EPA has far more resources than individual state environmental agencies, it should conduct research necessary to advance the designation of environmentally preferable products, including performance testing for emerging “green” products.
- EPA should help other federal agencies to direct economic development incentives, such as R&D funding, low-interest loans, etc. to support the production of “green” collar production facilities in the United States.
- EPA should continue to develop calculators and other tools that can help purchasing agents to more easily compare the environmental impacts of conventional versus green products.

I appreciate the opportunity to participate in this important discussion.

Sincerely,

Alicia Culver
Director
RPN