

OECD PROGRAMME ON SUSTAINABLE CONSUMPTION AND PRODUCTION

Workshop on Improving the Environmental Performance of Government

Paris, 8-9 October 1996

ORGANISATION FOR ECONOMIC CO-OPERATION AND DEVELOPMENT

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FOREWORD

In February 1996 OECD Ministers agreed a Council Recommendation on *Improving the Environmental Performance of Government* [see Annex 1]. This Recommendation, along with its sister Resolution on *Improving the Environmental Performance of the OECD*, is intended to spur Member country governments to reduce the environmental impacts of their own operations and decision-making processes.

The environmental performance of governments is a key theme in the international debate on sustainable consumption and production patterns. To support Member country initiatives to “green”¹ their activities and implement the Council Recommendation, the OECD hosted a workshop on 8-9 October 1996, in Paris. The workshop had three broad objectives:

- Examine the key immediate and long-term questions facing Member countries as they address the issues covered by the Council Recommendation on *Improving the Environmental Performance of Government*;
- Discuss information collection needs to prepare the Report to the Council in 1999 as called for in the Council Recommendation; and
- Determine how the OECD can most effectively support Member country governments in their efforts to improve their environmental performance.

Workshop discussions were divided into four sessions: i) a “boundary setting” discussion on “greening” of government; ii) strategic issues in improving the environmental performance of government facilities and operations; iii) improving the integration of environmental considerations in government decision-making processes; and iv) monitoring and evaluating progress. Member country presentations led off the discussion in each of these sessions. Greatest time was devoted to the substantive issues governments are facing as they move forward on critical questions such as target setting, procurement policies, environmental management systems, interministerial co-ordination and promoting action at all levels of government. Discussion and written input on these issues, as well as on the steps to be taken to monitor progress on government “greening” initiatives are reviewed in this Report. The list of Workshop participants is attached in Annex 2.

The Workshop was chaired by Mr. John Stevens, Head of the Environment Protection Strategy Division, Department of Environment, UK, who skilfully lent his experience and insight to an issue which, in times of budget constraints and efficiency objectives, is continually growing in importance. This report has been written by Elaine Geyer-Allély, Consultant to the OECD Environment Directorate. It is published on the responsibility of the Secretary-General of the OECD.

¹. In the interest of economising on words and paper, the terms “green” and “greening” in this Report refer to actions to “improve environmental performance”.

I. BACKGROUND

The OECD Council Recommendation on *Improving the Environmental Performance of Government* and the Council Resolution on *Improving the Environmental Performance of the OECD*² are the products of a heightened attention to the role of governments as consumers of goods and services. The Council Recommendation stems from the recognition that it is important that governments are able to demonstrate their ability to achieve levels of environmental performance that at least equal, if not surpass, performance in the private sector and households. This view was reinforced at the G-7 Meeting of Environment Ministers in Hamilton, Canada in 1995, where Ministers stressed the importance of the subject of “greening the Government” on the international environmental agenda. The G-7 called upon the OECD to consider the issue, and in response, the OECD organised a consultative meeting in November 1995 from which the Council Recommendation and Resolution emerged.³ Both instruments were agreed to by the OECD Council in February 1996.

The Recommendation covers actions which can be taken to improve environmental performance in government operations and facilities (often referred to as “green housekeeping”) and in government decision-making processes. The Recommendation was intentionally drafted to exclude the widest “circle” of government influence, which is the integration of environmental considerations into sector policies. Although the line between decision-making processes and the desired integration as a final outcome can become blurred, the focus of the Recommendation is on the internal workings of the government as an institution. The Recommendation is addressed to central/federal governments, although it contains an article which recommends central governments to promote action in regional and local government as well.

OECD work on the “greening” of government takes place within a broader framework of changing consumption and production patterns and Chapter 4 of Agenda 21. Chapter 4 notes the very significant role that the public sector plays in many countries, and the impact it can have in achieving national and international environmental goals. The environmental performance of government is mentioned in several international texts related to sustainable consumption and production, most recently in the May 1996 Decision of the UN Commission on Sustainable Development, which explicitly “notes with satisfaction the effort of OECD governments and invites governments to report to the Commission at its 5th Session [April 1997] on their experiences”.⁴ This Workshop provided one means of developing that input.

² An OECD Council Recommendation is not a binding legal instrument, but represents a policy commitment by the governments of Member countries. Although such a commitment is optional, in contrast to the binding nature of Decisions, practice nevertheless accords them great moral force as representing the political will of Member countries. An OECD Council Resolution is an internal decision concerning the work of the Organisation. Progress in implementing this Resolution is scheduled to be the subject of a report in 1997.

³ Consultative Meeting on “The ‘Greening’ of Government”, (OCDE/GD(97)99. Available upon request from the OECD Environment Directorate).

⁴ Report of the Fourth Session of the Commission on Sustainable Development to the Economic and Social Council (E/CN.17/1996/38).

II. OPENING DISCUSSION: HOW FAR CAN “GREENING” GOVERNMENTS TAKE US?

In the opening session participants explored the boundaries around initiatives to improve the environmental performance of government. In particular, three questions central to determining the location of those boundaries were addressed:

- 1) What is the relative impact of the government as a major consumer in the economy?
- 2) How effective is the government as a lever on other actors in society, particularly as a trend-setting consumer of environmentally preferable products and services, and what role does this suggest for government action in the market?
- 3) Are there limits to how far governments should go to “green” their operations?

The Government as a Consumer

Governments are important economic actors. Although the size of central governments varies in OECD countries, most have large building and vehicle stocks, manage significant land surfaces, and are big consumers of goods and services. In several Member countries, the government is the single largest consumer, accounting for approximately 20-25% of GNP. The sheer size of the government make its potential impact on the environment self-evident.

The importance of the government’s role as consumer, land holder, facility owner and operator raises questions regarding the most effective way to promote better environmental performance by governments. Most countries appear to be using a combination of different approaches to stimulate action, including voluntary programmes (e.g. best practice guidelines, voluntary targets); regulatory measures (e.g. laws and regulations applicable to government facilities; Executive Orders; mandatory standards or product specifications, etc.); and economic instruments (e.g. financial incentives, grants). Participants stressed that Government agencies often have different incentives and responsibilities than either the private sector or individual consumers vis-a-vis their environmental performance. Efforts to stimulate greater commitment to “greening” initiatives must bear these in mind. The question of what motivates government agencies to improve their environmental performance is addressed again below.

Government Action as a Lever

Government action can be a powerful agent of change and many governments use that leverage to bring about socially desirable goals. For instance, there are examples of successful experiences in several OECD countries where government purchasing choices have facilitated the development of markets for environmentally preferable products (e.g. recycled paper in Germany, re-refined oil in the US). Lessons drawn from these experiences reveal, however, that using the leverage of government purchasing has limits in terms of efficiency, effectiveness and value for investment (of both time and resources). Using market power is also less effective than other mechanisms (regulatory or financial instruments) where the government is not a major market player. Similarly, the decision to use market power as a lever is easy when there are obvious “win-win” situations, but becomes more difficult when the objective is to promote a wider or more fundamental change in products and technologies. These aspects were developed more fully in discussions on strategic issues around the “greening” of procurement policies. (See Section III.)

Limits to Government Action

There is a fairly wide diversity among OECD Member countries in the scope of “greening” actions taken to date, and consequently, the opportunities remaining for government to make further progress. In a number of OECD countries, “greening” the government has received very little attention in the past, and the “low-hanging” fruit are still there for the taking. Mexico, for example, pointed to very recent, and very large, achievements in energy efficiency in public schools, which resulted when spending and savings on electricity bills were decentralised and placed in the hands of municipalities.

On the other hand, in countries with a longer experience in “greening” initiatives many of the most straightforward actions have been taken. Many of these have been within office settings, such as energy efficiency plans, and action to address paper consumption and recycling. Such countries are now finding themselves confronted with steeper investment curves to make more fundamental and comprehensive changes to the way their central government goes about its business. Difficult decisions about investing in new technologies or systems raise questions about impacts on the economy and competitiveness. Some options are also decidedly less “attractive” and require a larger effort to garner interest and commitment.

A related issue is the spread of responsibility for “greening” actions within various government Ministries and Agencies. In most OECD Member countries, the responsibility for promoting “greening” initiatives has been vested largely with the Environment Ministries. Other Ministries have been slow or reluctant to invest time and effort on such actions. For many governments this situation means that there are short-term barriers to greater progress, including the need to devote time and resources to raising awareness and educating peers in other Ministries.

It is also true that the government’s environmental objectives must be balanced with a wide set of other social objectives, some of which appear to be, or are, in conflict with purely environmental considerations. The reach of the central government, particularly in federal countries, is also restricted. Where there are limits to the push that can be given to environmental objectives, mechanisms are needed to ensure a systematic integration of environmental considerations in the day-to-day government decision-making processes. This issue constitutes a major element of the Council Recommendation, and one which was examined through a variety of different lenses throughout the workshop. (See Section IV.)

Despite the potential and actual limitations to the ability of governments to improve their environmental performance, there was wide agreement that even the most advanced governments still have progress to make. Federal facilities in several countries, for example, often lag behind the private sector in complying with environmental laws and regulations. The rate and degree of implementation of “greening” initiatives are also slow in many countries. The remainder of Workshop discussions focused on some key areas of government action and the barriers and accelerators to greater progress.

III. STRATEGIC ISSUES IN IMPROVING THE ENVIRONMENTAL PERFORMANCE OF GOVERNMENT FACILITIES AND OPERATIONS

The Council Recommendation covers several elements related to “greening” government facilities and operations. Workshop discussions focused on three of these:

- 1) the use of *quantitative targets and timetables* to promote change within government departments and agencies;
- 2) strategic questions related to using *government purchasing* as a mechanism for influencing products and services in the economy in general; and,
- 3) the issues associated with applying *environmental management systems* to improve the integration of environmental considerations in day-to-day government operations.

The goals of the discussion of these three themes were to: review Member country progress in the three areas concerned; identify the problems, successes, and issues that countries are encountering, in particular to identify the barriers and accelerators to progress; and, identify any examples of “Best Practices” that should be more widely disseminated.

Goals, Targets and Timetables

Led by a presentation on quantitative targets in Japan’s “Action Plan for Greening Government Operations” workshop participants discussed the relative advantages and disadvantages of setting quantified targets compared with other methods of promoting change (e.g. qualitative goals, strategy statements).

The Japanese Action Plan was adopted in July 1995 as the government’s contribution to the implementation of the Basic Environmental Plan (the strategic guiding document laying out Japan’s principal objectives in the environmental field). Implementation of the Action Plan is expected to significantly reduce the environmental load from government operations and to enhance voluntary actions by local governments, business enterprises and citizens. All Ministries and Agencies of the central government have committed themselves to implementing the Action Plan.

The Action Plan sets concrete targets, of which 11 are quantitative, to be achieved by the fiscal year 2000 (See Table 1). The 11 quantitative targets were developed by the Environment Agency in light of a study of its own consumption patterns. For instance, Environment Agency officials estimated that an 8% reduction in energy consumption per unit office space could be achieved simply through the installation of energy efficient lightbulbs and their more rational use. The same potential is expected to hold true for office energy use across the government. Similar estimates were made for the other target categories, then negotiated with the Ministries and Agencies concerned. The Action Plan was agreed across the Japanese government at the Director-General level, ensuring both high-level commitment and ownership in the process. The Plan includes some flexibility to allow any overseas office or other specialist organisation (self-defence force, post offices, prisons, meteorological organisations) that feels it cannot implement all elements of the Plan as designed, to develop its own “operative” plan for specific issues. Each Ministry and Agency has also incorporated a mechanism to review progress in achieving the targets set.

Although the Japanese government did not make an official estimate of the budgetary implications of implementing the Action Plan, Environment Agency officials do not believe that a supplementary budget will be needed to achieve targets in areas such as water and energy efficiency. However, where additional funds may be needed, for example for the introduction of low-emission vehicles, Agencies have felt some budgetary resistance.

Data on consumption trends in the headquarters of other Ministries and Agencies, and on CO₂ emissions from administrative works, have been collected. These data and the government's "greening" activities are open to public review and were reported in the annual report to the Diet in May 1996. The Japanese government is compiling a final report on the actions of the entire government, including regional offices and research institutes. Regional offices account for 96.5% of the government. To stimulate action in these locations, federal officials are conducting a national campaign in 11 major cities to help officials understand and implement the Action Plan.

Table 1

Quantitative Targets in Japan's Action Plan for Greening Government Operations	
Virgin pulp consumption	Total content of virgin pulp in paper purchased and used to be reduced to approximately 80% or less of current level
Introduction of low-pollution-emission vehicles	Low-pollution-emission vehicles to comprise 10% of government owned vehicles for use in ordinary administrative work
Paper consumption	Total volume of paper used will not increase from current levels.
Construction work	10% reduction of projected volume of waste.
Energy use	Electricity consumption per unit office space to be reduced to less than @90% of current levels.
Water use	Water consumption per unit office space to be reduced to less than @90% of current level
Use of government vehicles	Amount of fuel consumed by government vehicles to be reduced to less than @ 90% of current level
Energy use in government buildings	Fuel consumption by utilities in government buildings to be reduced by @ 10% of current level
Waste generation	Volume of wastes generated from each office to be reduced to less than @75% of current level
Waste incineration	Volume of wastes which can be incinerated to be reduced to less than 70% of current level.
Environmental pollution prevention	Emission of CO ₂ generated from administrative works either directly or indirectly to be limited based on the action programme to arrest global warming.

A number of other OECD Member countries have set quantitative targets in specific areas. The US, Australia, the Netherlands and the UK, for instance, have all set targets for reducing energy consumption (See Table 2). Many countries also have reduction targets for the release of toxic chemicals from federal facilities or for office waste, and targets for the increased purchase of goods with recycled content. Few countries, however, have set quantitative goals in as many areas as the Japanese government.

Table 2

Energy Reduction Targets in Four OECD Member Country Governments	
Australia	15% overall reduction over 1992-93 levels by 1998-99 and 25% by 2003-04
Netherlands	17% overall reduction
UK	15% overall reduction over 1990 levels by 1996. New targets to be established for 2000.
US	30% overall reduction over 1993-1994 levels by 2005

Two principal barriers impede the development of targets: i) the lack of baseline data, and ii) the difficulty of determining what is an appropriate target. In most countries, federal facilities and agencies do not monitor their water, energy or materials consumption or their waste production. A growing trend in some countries toward the decentralisation of purchasing responsibilities also means that it is not easy to know what goods and services the government consumes. Without such baseline data it is difficult to project future trends and to set realistic targets. Nevertheless, there may be areas where it is not necessary to do extensive data gathering. The Canadian government, for instance, was able to set rigorous government-wide targets for waste reduction without financing extensive audits for each department, after a case study and literature review on office waste found wide similarity in

the composition of most federal office waste streams. In general, however, the absence of a baseline on which to build targets is an important obstacle.

Defining the starting point is only part of the problem, however. OECD governments are also working to determine what are reasonable targets. At least four considerations were noted by participants as part of the process of defining a "valid" target:

- 1) the investment of time and effort needed to achieve the target;
- 2) the associated costs and benefits;
- 3) the relative contribution that can reasonably be expected from technological, organisational and behavioural changes; and
- 4) the level of progress represented when a target is reached, and whether it is sufficient.

In the US, experience with targets for energy consumption and toxic chemical releases have provided several lessons. The first is the need to view targets not as static goals, but as evolving benchmarks that are modified as technological capacity, and other factors that influence consumption patterns, change. The US "33/50 Program" for toxic chemical releases has also demonstrated the importance of flexibility in how targets are reached. Under this voluntary programme, the US government set incremental objectives for the reduction of releases of 17 priority chemicals from federal agencies and industry. Within a general framework which encouraged pollution prevention and source reduction, the Program gave wide latitude to companies and federal agencies to determine how they obtained the targeted

33% reduction in 3 years and 50% in 5 years. This flexibility is largely credited with stimulating much faster results than were being sought: a 33% reduction in 2 years and 50% in 4 years. Critics of the Program, however, have argued that a proportion of these reductions were achieved through the increased use of substitutes and/or a transfer of releases to other media. US officials have drawn several conclusions from this experience, notably that significant progress can be achieved by combining specific targets with a degree of flexibility to encourage innovation and faster progress, but that the main objective of *reaching* a target cannot override consideration of *how* it is to be achieved.

Experience in a number of countries has also revealed the importance of ensuring that targets are meaningful at the operational level. Sweden, for example, has embarked on a programme to revise their current national targets in order to provide a comprehensive but "user-friendly" range of objectives. Sweden currently has 167 goals, some specific and others more general. As part of this reform, a number of pilot agencies will work to formulate targets that take into account the specifics of their own activities, and which reflect their priority concerns. The number of targets each agency sets will increase as its internal competence in target development grows. Similarly, in France, targets will be set through both a top-down and bottom-up process of consultation with specific administrative staff and decision-makers, so that key individuals at the Agency level can help to ensure their validity.

Showing an explicit link to wider objectives is another element of making targets meaningful and generating support: target setting cannot take place in a vacuum. This argument is intuitive, but not always borne out in practice. The links between targets and objectives become even more important once countries have moved beyond relatively simple first steps to more ambitious targets that are typically accompanied by an increasing need to justify the additional time and investment required to achieve them.

A majority of participants agreed that despite the difficulties associated with establishing targets, they are important tools for achieving environmental objectives for government operations. Targets provide an indicator of a strategic direction for facilities and agencies working in diverse areas, and provide a concrete goal on which management and staff can focus. Where they are tied to high-level administrative and/or public review, targets help to engender commitment to environmental issues -- a particularly important motor for generating action in Ministries and Agencies where the environment is not high on the agenda. Public review of government performance on targets, however, can be a sensitive issue. Where government agencies have measured up poorly in the past there may be significant resistance to setting out a new yardstick for future criticism. Even where there is sufficient will to meet environmental objectives, other barriers not immediately visible to the public eye may stand in the way of strong performance. In the UK, for example, officials have recognised that expecting different parts of the government to achieve the targeted 15% reduction in energy consumption may not sufficiently account for the specificity of each Department's operations. More energy-intensive agencies (for instance, where computerised systems have been put in place to improve the efficiency of social security functions) may find themselves revealed in a negative light for reasons unconnected with their efforts to "green" their operations. Where public scrutiny is an integral part of the government's "greening" strategy, participants agreed that the more professional rigour and transparency there is in the target setting process, the better grounded the dialogue with the public will be. A related issue not covered at the workshop, but which participants regarded as important, was the involvement of representatives of the private sector in the target setting process, particularly where the acquisition of alternative goods and services is envisaged.

Where it is not possible to set quantitative targets, some countries have opted to encourage "Best Practice". This is the approach taken, for example, to reduce water consumption in Canadian federal Departments and Agencies. Because only a small percentage of water consumption is measured in Canadian federal buildings, officials have not been able to determine what is a realistic consumption target. The government is now beginning to measure water consumption so that targets can be set in the

future, but in the interim officials know that it is a win-win strategy to encourage good housekeeping practices. The question was posed, but not resolved, whether such “best practices” can actually serve as a substitute for quantitative targets, or whether they in effect avoid the problem of identifying trends, achievable targets, and perhaps more aggressive strategies.

Government Procurement Policies

A majority of OECD governments have initiatives to green their procurement policies. Workshop discussions focused on some of the long-term, strategic issues related to procurement policies, led by a presentation by the US Environmental Protection Agency (USEPA). With purchases equivalent to 20% of GNP, the federal government is the single largest consumer of goods and services in the US. That market presence gives the government the opportunity to realise significant economic and environmental benefits by creating demand for, and supply of, environmentally preferable goods and services.

Several legislative Acts and Executive Orders give the US government a mandate to use procurement policies to promote change: phasing-out purchases of ozone depleting substances; promoting the acquisition of alternative fuelled vehicles; purchasing computer equipment which meets “Energy Star” requirements; eliminating or reducing acquisition of hazardous and toxic chemicals; designating minimum recycled content (e.g. 20 per cent post-consumer waste content for paper; 30 per cent from 1998); and purchasing energy efficient “best practice” products. Revisions have also been made to procurement policies, standards and specifications to facilitate pollution prevention and “affirmative” procurement more generally. For example, the General Services Administration (GSA) removed requirements for virgin materials (e.g. in paper) in its specifications and the Department of Transportation altered highway specifications to permit the use of recovered materials.

There is a growing trend in the US and other OECD countries, however, to move away from specifications and standards and to allow government employees more discretion in purchasing commercial goods. This decentralisation, which could be seen as working against the objective of using the bulk of government purchases as leverage, is happening in response to other pressures.

To reconcile the desire for greater purchasing independence within government agencies with the purchasing agent’s need for effective guidance, OECD countries are exploring different ways of facilitating procurement decisions. The US, for example, has drafted a guidance document on procurement of environmentally preferable products based on seven general principles [See Box 1]. There is a real question, however, as to whether it will be possible to structure a set of guidelines which are both simple enough to be user-friendly and technical enough to be useful.

Several other countries are also looking at general guidance documents to provide procurement officers with a flexible but still useful tool. In the UK, government officials are looking at the potential for life-cycle analysis to serve as part of general guidance on procurement policies. Where life-cycle information is requested -- even on a voluntary basis -- it has the added value of encouraging manufacturers of government purchased goods and services to green their production processes. Similarly, the German government is currently investigating whether procurement agents can ask their private sector suppliers whether they have an environmental management system in place. Participants also made the link to environmental management systems for the *public* sector as another way of encouraging the consideration of environmental impacts in procurement policies. Finally, it was noted that ecolabelling programmes -- where they exist -- can provide some help to purchasing agents, but that currently the lists of certified companies and products are limited in number and scope.

A second major theme discussed in the Workshop was government purchasing power as a lever in the market. There was wide agreement that the government is a major economic actor and can be a powerful agent of change in the marketplace. This role goes beyond the State taking the lead until the market catches up, and reflects the permanent presence of the government as a consumer capable of shaping trends in a dynamic market. Government action in the market can create a new factor of competitiveness, by providing signals on what will be competitive in the future. Experience in Japan has highlighted that involving stakeholders, especially business, from the beginning of government

US Guidance on Environmentally Preferable Products

Environmentally Preferable Products are “products that have lesser or reduced effect on human health and the environment when compared with competing products or services that serve the same purpose.” The Guidance is not regulatory, but contains seven general principles designed to help agencies to consider “environmental preferability” in their purchasing decisions. These seven principles include consideration of:

1. pollution prevention;
2. life-cycle costing;
3. multiple environmental attributes (i.e. shifting from single medium evaluations of a product, such as impacts on air quality only, to a multi-media approach)
4. the magnitude of environmental impact;
5. local conditions, such as natural resource availability;
6. competition among vendors; and
7. product attribute claims.

To demonstrate the application of the guiding principles and tools in the proposed guidance, the USEPA is working in partnership with other federal agencies on specific product categories. The EPA and the General Services Administration, for example, have worked together on a novel pilot project on cleaning products, involving input from industry, public interest groups and government employees using the products. Vendors of the 19 products under review voluntarily listed information on factors such as skin irritation, food chain exposure, air pollution potential, reduced/recyclable packaging, fragrances and dyes, and product features to minimise exposure to concentrates. The objective of this initiative was not to definitively rank the preferability of the 19 products -- the full matrix of environmental, health and safety considerations is too vast -- but rather to provide clear, comparable information on a variety of product attributes to facilitate federal purchasing decisions.

programmes to stimulate the supply of environmentally preferable goods is important and can improve the likelihood that government market initiatives will be welcomed.

Experience in the US has shown that the government’s leverage to influence products on the market is most effective for individual products used across the government. For example, to deal with the environmental impact of used and discarded oil and tires to serve a government fleet of 300,000 vehicles (plus an additional 200,000 Postal Service vehicles), the EPA designated re-refined oil and retread tires for federal procurement in 1988. Six years later, however, acquisition of these recycled content products

was nearly non-existent -- with retread tires only slightly more than 3% of total federal tire purchases, and federal re-refined oil procurement only slightly more than 1% of all lubrication oil purchased.

The slow progress in these areas was the result of a combination of myths (about performance and availability) and real barriers (written guidance from the principal Administration responsible for managing the majority of the government fleet, which prohibited the use of re-refined oil because of the risk of voiding manufacturers' warranties). In an interagency effort to overcome these hurdles, government officials convened an "Oil Summit" in 1994 with representatives responsible for government fleet management, concerned officials from other federal agencies, oil manufacturers, and automakers. The results of that effort were a clear statement by the three largest US automakers allowing certified re-refined oil in their warrantied vehicles, a marketing strategy by the re-refined oil industry to improve distribution and commercial availability, and a partnership with a major lubricating oil supplier to federal organisations to increase the availability of re-refined oil for federal customers.

US Government purchasing power has been influential in stimulating the demand and supply of other products, such as recycled-content paper (for which de-inking technology was put in place because the government was a major customer). However, these efforts have been resource and time-intensive, and could not be repeated for every environmentally preferable product.

The workshop also explored the issue of the relative price of "greener" products and the fact that procurement policies must balance the interest of the tax payers (e.g. value for money) and other objectives of which environmental quality is just one. Government purchasers must weigh how much they are willing to pay for environmentally preferable goods and services and demonstrate the relative benefits in environmental and other terms. A key issue for many countries is the absence of formal life-cycle costing approaches that would allow government agencies to spread the costs of products over a number of years or to justify higher overall or up-front costs. Participants agreed that this is an issue where additional work is needed.

Many of the issues touched upon in this session were taken up and developed further in the OECD Conference on Greener Public Purchasing, hosted by the Swiss government in Biel (February 1997). Major conclusions from that Conference were that:

- The identification of what constitutes a greener product is frequently influenced by local environmental priorities. Greater transparency and multi-stakeholder participation are required of the mechanisms by which product criteria are identified and decided upon (e.g. for ecolabelling, or possible applications of ISO standards and EMS).
- Greener public purchasing can be implemented at different levels of government, and is promoted by a clear identification of the roles and responsibilities of each agency concerned.
- Information exchange is a key determinant of the success of environmentally preferable public purchasing, whether it concerns environmental data about products, the various phases of a tender, or the specific information support which purchasers, bidders and users need; and
- The need to ensure that greener purchasing programmes are compatible with fair and free trade remains one of the most sensitive challenges encountered by greener purchasing. It is being tackled both through international and national tendering legislation and the development of environment-related international standards.

Applying Environmental Management Systems in Government-owned or Operated Facilities

A number of countries have begun to look at applying environmental management systems (EMS) to their government operations and facilities. An EMS is a management framework designed to guide government agencies to achieve environmental quality objectives or standards in their day-to-day activities.

Workshop discussions on the challenges of implementing an EMS in government agencies were led by a presentation on Germany's efforts in this area. Germany's interest in developing an EMS stems from the recognition that many of the basic steps to improve the government's environmental performance have already been taken. The government is now increasingly facing issues that are not easy to define or are difficult to implement. Moreover, taking federal, state and local administrations together, the German government is made up of approximately 16,000 highly autonomous units. Progress in "greening" this vast body requires a systematic environmental approach -- an EMS -- executed through goals and targets, implementation programmes, and monitoring and evaluation. Germany's objective is to make each government unit capable of optimising its operations.

The German initiative has several hurdles to overcome. Although the government has been focusing on private sector EMS over the last 6 years, there is no "in-house" experience with applying environmental management systems to the public sector. A first concern is defining the *scope* of the system: whether an EMS should cover just the direct environmental effects from government day-to-day operations (housekeeping) or also the indirect effects related to government policies. The government has the most impact through the latter, but defining a scope as wide as all of government decision-making and policy formulation blurs the distinction with other tools such as environmental impact assessment. In Austria, for instance, the feeling is that an EMS for public agencies should only take into account those elements of their operations which they independently control; integration questions should be addressed through established strategic environmental impact assessment mechanisms.

A second consideration is the *type* of system which can be put in place given traditional institutional structures and cultures. One challenge is to reconcile the management and budget imperatives implied by an EMS with public sector budgeting mechanisms which often make it difficult to invest money in the short-term for benefits in the long-term. Another challenge, which the Canadian government faces, is to design an EMS for existing management structures where currently priorities, responsibility, and accountability for dealing with environmental issues are not always clearly defined. Securing high-level commitment to tackle fundamental or less glamorous goals is a third. "Greening" initiatives must also compete internally for scarce resources.

There are other practical problems. The factors that have motivated the private sector to establish environmental management systems are different in certain important respects to those that motivate the public sector, particularly at the central government level: avoiding risk to public health and safety; saving costs; building a strong public image (although the closer connection local governments have to citizens makes them more sensitive to this issue). It is important to recognise these differences and to identify the motivating factors for government.

One motivation echoed by a number of participants was the need for a systematic approach to environmental issues in order to ensure a successful environmental protection strategy. In Sweden, the impetus to apply an EMS to government operations has not come from market pressures but from the high-level commitment of the Prime Minister. The Swedish government began a project in 1997 to develop pilot systems in the Communications and Transport agencies, where some initial steps have already been taken in this direction. Efforts to develop an EMS in Canada have also benefited from top-

down commitment, but Canadian officials have focused on a bottom-up approach to integrate environmental considerations in behaviour at all levels. The UK has been trying to make the European Union's Environmental Management and Audit System (EMAS) available to local authorities and a few have received accreditation for certain services. Consultants currently are also looking at applying EMAS principles within the UK Housing Corporation (a government-funded body responsible for a significant proportion of UK social housing provision). Responses from government agencies have been mixed: in the US, for example, smaller federal agencies are concerned by the rigour, public scrutiny and cost associated with developing an EMS. Larger agencies have been more positive.

While progress on establishing environmental management systems within government agencies may be slow, the German federal government is looking for ways to accelerate the process. These include reducing set-up costs through a variety of mechanisms; stimulating interest in EMS by offering information on the potential ecological and economic benefits of government operations run under an EMS; offering models for structuring an EMS; conducting research on specific elements; and profiling local administration "pioneers" to serve as an example to other government officials.

Many of the difficulties the German government currently faces are common to other countries. In fact, although several Member countries are interested in the implications of environmental management systems for government operations, only a small subset have actually begun to explore the practical issues of applying an EMAS- or ISO14000-based management system to their green housekeeping or decision-making practices.⁵

Participants also briefly debated whether it would be useful to eventually pursue the "standardisation" of environmental management systems, based either on EMAS or ISO14000 principles. Although many governments are using one or the other of these approaches as reference points, most participants agreed that standardisation would be premature, as countries are still in the initial stages of determining where and how an EMS can be applied in their government operations. There is a general tendency to observe and learn from private sector experience, at the same time encouraging and actively supporting those government agencies that want to move ahead more quickly.

⁵. The ISO 14001 standard of the International Organization for Standardization (ISO), and the EU Council regulation concerning the *voluntary participation by companies in the industrial sector in a Community eco-management and audit scheme* (EMAS), were devised so as to promote the establishment of environmental management systems within firms. In essence, their purpose is to provide company or agency management with a framework to implement environmental objectives. They are also meant to assure stakeholders that environmental considerations are integrated in day-to-day operations. Core elements are common to both systems, and include guidelines on key elements of an EMS, self-assessment procedures and third-party conformity assessment. EMAS differs from the ISO 14001 standard in so far as it requires participating companies to provide information on a number of preset issues, and to have the information verified by a certified auditor. Currently, there is considerable debate over the relative effectiveness of the two systems in promoting continuous improvement of environmental performance and in responding to public concerns.

IV. IMPROVING THE INTEGRATION OF ENVIRONMENTAL CONSIDERATIONS IN GOVERNMENT DECISION-MAKING PROCESSES

The second major element of the OECD Council Recommendation refers to several important actions to improve the integration of environmental considerations in government decision-making processes: establishing effective mechanisms for consultation and co-ordination among ministries and agencies; developing awareness of government officials of environmental considerations; building staff skills; encouraging and promoting action at all levels of government and the public sector; working with the private sector on pilot projects; and exchanging information. The Workshop looked at two of these elements of “greener” decision-making:

- horizontal co-ordination within and between government agencies; and
- vertical co-ordination between central and local government.

Mechanisms for Inter-Ministerial Consultation and Co-ordination

A presentation from the UK Treasury outlined the UK’s efforts to establish mechanisms to promote greater integration of environmental considerations in government decision-making. A Ministerial Committee on the Environment (a committee of the Cabinet) provides the forum in which Ministers from relevant government Departments can collectively consider environmental issues. In addition, each Department nominates its own “Green Minister” whose job is to ensure that environmental considerations are integrated into the strategy and policies of that Department. A committee of senior civil servants, chaired by the Cabinet office, comes together several times a year as a policy steering committee. A civil service network of “Green Contacts” has links at official level across all government Departments to develop best practice and to co-ordinate policy.

To help ensure consistency in the consideration of environmental effects in government decision-making, the Department of Environment has published a guide on “Policy Appraisal and the Environment” in order to increase awareness within government of the need to examine systematically the effects on the environment of existing and proposed policies. The impressions of government officials are recorded to monitor the use and effectiveness of this guidance document. A series of case studies are also under development to monitor the degree to which policy integration is taking place.

The UK government faces some practical difficulties in improving integration. Although there is general support that policy appraisal is a sound idea, it has sometimes proved difficult to convince other Ministries to include environmental effects as significant considerations in the decision-making process, particularly when other factors, such as distributional effects, weigh heavily. Other barriers include the difficulty of putting values on environmental costs and benefits -- a problem exacerbated in some areas by scientific uncertainty. Improving the appraisal of environmental effects, costs and benefits (through better valuation techniques and more research) will improve policy integration.

OECD Member country governments who share this set of problems have responded with a variety of strategies. The government of the Netherlands, for example, has developed an inter-departmental support centre --bringing together staff from the Environment, Economic Affairs, and Justice Ministries -- to help central government officials “test” any given policy proposals against three sets of considerations: impacts on business, impacts on the environment, and a proposal’s “legislative quality”. This Centre’s key function is to serve as a neutral body that helps agencies identify and lay out key information on the

range of potential positive and negative impacts of the policies they propose. The Centre is involved at an early stage of policy development, and works on selected questions; not all legislative proposals are required to go through this process.

Several participants indicated that the often difficult and sporadic nature of contacts between Environment ministries and other ministries was a major brake on more integrated decision-making. It is true that on a strategic level, countries have established co-ordinating mechanisms, such as in Sweden where State Secretaries meet regularly to discuss and demonstrate how their Ministries are contributing to national sustainable development objectives. The strength of this group, as in the example of the Netherlands, is that it addresses problems and potential solutions in the early stages of policy development. Efforts at integration in Poland, Hungary, and Norway have also been driven in part by strategic considerations of sustainable development. At the working level, however, integration becomes a more concrete challenge as conflicting objectives and different operating frameworks come more sharply into focus. In France, it was stressed, regardless of the degree of co-ordination and consultation, integration moves forward best when there is a team responsible for progress in each Ministry and the Environment Ministry remains in constant contact to act as a co-ordinating body and, sometimes, mediator.

The US uses a number of task forces at Assistant Secretary of State level which meet regularly to resolve difficult interdepartmental issues. These task forces are supported by a set of lower-level groups which work out particular problems. In addition, the US is currently developing a set of tools to facilitate the integration of environmental considerations into federal government operations, including a primer on environmental cost accounting and "green" GDP. "Greening" the government was the first element of the National Performance Review process, which is part of the US "re-inventing government" initiative.

In Canada, the development of, and agreement on, a *Green Government Guide* came through a joint working group involving consultation with a number of different Departments. Those Departments are now required to develop implementation strategies in consultation with the public and NGOs and to table the strategies in Parliament. The Canadian government is presently debating whether it is useful to have so many stand-alone reports or whether -- in another step towards greater integration -- it would be more productive to look horizontally at cross-cutting themes that must be considered in a number of Departments. Efforts at integration have also brought clarity to interdepartmental discussions and encouraged a commonality of approach in some areas. For example, a senior level working group from a number of government Departments, which meets every 6 weeks to discuss potential regulation, recently looked at the clean-up of federal sites. The group discovered that they were working around different sets of assumptions and, as a result, each agreed to help finance the development of a common framework from which individual Departments could work.

Promoting Action at All Levels of Government

Although the OECD Council Recommendation is addressed to central governments, it calls upon Member countries to promote measures to improve environmental performance at all levels of government. For some governments, this means leading by example and encouraging local and regional initiatives. In other OECD countries, the government can go much farther. A presentation of how the French government is taking a direct role in promoting change in regional and local administrations led Workshop discussions on this theme.

In France, as in many countries, government “downsizing” and the desire to increase the efficiency of government operations are important drivers of the effort to improve the government’s environmental performance. This “greening” initiative is relatively recent and is led by an inter-ministerial steering group supported by a number of working groups devoted to different themes (e.g. building maintenance and construction, natural resource conservation, water and energy efficiency, procurement, waste management, vehicle fleet). The French approach is a “top-down” programme of information, training and support for central, regional and local administrations. The Steering Group is responsible for first developing greater awareness among top-level officials and managers in the various Ministries, and then developing tailor-made programmes of action. The initiative is also “top-down” in that it will begin with an audit and programme of action for the services of the President of the Republic and the Prime Minister. At the regional and local levels the central government will work with the regional offices of several Ministries as well as the regional offices of the Energy and Environment Agency (ADEME). These services will inform, train and help regional and local managers in the key action areas.

In a large number of OECD countries, the central government does not have this same range of influence. Participants were quick to point out, however, that many regional and local governments are active on environmental issues related to their own administrations -- and in some cases are more progressive than the central government. Activity at the local level is often tied to “Local Agenda 21s” and involves close collaboration with, and motivation from, the local community.

At the same time, participants stressed that “greening” of government is one of many competing priorities at the regional and local level (as it is at the central government level) and may not receive adequate attention. Most countries have often found it necessary to encourage regional and local governments to green their operations, while recognising the different organisational cultures and institutional frameworks in place.

Participants identified a number of means by which the central government can facilitate action at the regional and local level, including mechanisms to reduce set-up costs for “greening” initiatives, financial assistance, information exchange, and transmitting best practices. The French central government, for instance, contracts with local governments to finance implementation of local Agenda 21s. In some countries, central government funding for local initiatives is significant: in Hungary, for example, 75% of local environmental actions are financed out of the central coffers. In one interesting but isolated example of central and local partnership in the US, the federal government is working with 150 municipal governments in an attempt to drive market forces related to the acquisition of recycled-content goods. A number of countries are also developing environmental management systems which include regional administrations. In all cases, participants noted the importance of having good reporting and evaluation mechanisms not only to track progress at the local and regional levels, but also to motivate officials to do more.

Participants also stressed the importance of the example set by central governments, including action at the highest levels. There are a growing number of these, including the proposed audits of the services of the French President and Prime Minister, the completed audit of the US White House and the energy survey of the services of the UK Prime Minister. These and other “high visibility” initiatives (The face of London’s clock tower, “Big Ben”, is lit with energy efficient bulbs.) help demonstrate the central government’s commitment and willingness to invest in “greening” its operations.

V. MONITORING AND EVALUATING PROGRESS

In the final session of the Workshop, participants addressed questions about how to evaluate progress on government “greening” initiatives and how to gather relevant information for the 1999 Report to the OECD Council called for by the Council Recommendation. Three separate but related issues were examined:

1. Supporting and using the OECD Environmental Performance Review process by systematically integrating questions on the environmental performance of government into country reviews;
2. Information exchange to promote greater progress, in particular using the Internet; and
3. Information collection for the 1999 Report and beyond.

OECD Environmental Performance Reviews

The Council Recommendation invites the OECD to monitor, assess, and report on Member country progress on improving their environmental performance through the Environmental Performance Reviews (EPRs). The EPR programme was created with a strong mandate from OECD Ministers to evaluate whether countries “do what they say” on environmental issues: the benchmarks for any country’s evaluation, then, are its own domestic objectives and international commitments. The EPR process examines three main questions relating to the achievement of those objectives: i) To what extent is the objective achieved? ii) Is the objective ambitious or modest? and iii) Are results achieved in a cost-effective way?

Although the integration of environmental considerations into government policies is not a new theme in the EPRs, a specific focus on government operations is. Questions on “greening” of government will be included as one theme in the cross-cutting issue on economic and environmental integration. To facilitate the work of the EPR teams, the Environment Secretariat will define the boundaries of this question (e.g. a focus on central government) and draft a core set of priority items to be examined by EPR teams in order to assess Member country progress on “greening” initiatives.

Information Exchange: “Greening” on the Net

Environment Canada has established an Internet site on “greening” the OECD which is intended to provide a forum for OECD Member governments to provide accessible information about their “greening” activities. Participants followed a live demonstration of the Internet website and discussed ways for individual countries to gradually bring information on their “greening” initiatives to this forum. Currently the site reflects eleven categories of actions, but the Canadian government has agreed to restructure the site to reflect the major elements of the Council Recommendation. Box 2 shows the current format for the site and explains how to gain access to it.

To date, only a few countries have active Internet sites on their environmental actions, and fewer still have information specific to “greening” of government initiatives. The OECD Secretariat outlined the role it could play to host this site, including maintaining a central “homepage” and the links to national

information bases in each Member country. The purpose of this discussion was to get a clear indication of whether Member countries would find such a site a useful method for disseminating information about their “greening” initiatives and would commit themselves to maintaining their contribution to it. To help countries evaluate this opportunity, the Secretariat will be developing and circulating a detailed explanation of what would be involved in establishing such a site. Member countries will then be asked to indicate their level of interest and ability to participate.

Information collection for 1999 Report and beyond

The OECD Environment Policy Committee must report to the OECD Council in 1999 on progress made in implementing the Recommendation on *Improving the Environmental Performance of Government*. This session of the Workshop explored additional activities which the OECD should undertake to compile the 1999 report, and to support Member country initiatives more generally. Participants decided to use a matrix of Country Activities as a tool to gather detailed information on Member country initiatives on the various elements in the Council Recommendation. The headings and subheadings of that matrix are shown in Table 3.

In addition, participants identified a number of other areas where additional work, perhaps through expert meetings, could be useful, including: target setting; environmental management systems; life-cycle costing in federal governments, and mechanisms for facilitating interdepartmental co-ordination.

Table 3

Elements of the OECD Council Recommendation on Improving the Environment Performance of Government			
FRAMEWORK	FACILITIES AND OPERATIONS	DECISION-MAKING PROCESS	MONITORING/ EVALUATION
Strategy statements Legislation/Regulation International agreements Other Government profile	Energy Water Materials Natural Resource & Land Management Waste Management Green Procurement EMS Public Investment & Infrastructure Other Vehicle Fleet Human Resource Management Defense	Action at all levels of Government Interministerial Consultation & Co-ordination Staff capacity building Communications Environmental Impact Assessment	Monitoring: compliance, criteria Information Evaluation Self-assessment

As a result of the Workshop, the OECD Environment Secretariat will be following up on a number of action items, including:

- Co-ordination within the Environment Secretariat to develop a “checklist” of a core set of issues on improving the environmental performance of governments for use in the OECD Environmental Performance Review Programme;
- Establishing an informal network of OECD Member country government officials working on environmental management systems to facilitate information exchange, and potentially examine the usefulness of an OECD expert Workshop;
- Developing a letter on the use of the Internet site established by Environment Canada to determine Member country interest and participation;
- Expanding the Annex of country activities as the principal tool for information gathering for the 1999 report as well as examining the possibility for holding additional expert workshops on key themes highlighted by participants.

The results of the Workshop will also be reviewed as part of the wider review of progress on Sustainable Consumption and Production scheduled for review in February 1997. Key messages have also been transmitted to the UN Commission on Sustainable Development at its 5th Session and will form as part of the evaluation of progress on the broader theme of Sustainable Consumption and Production in a report to OECD Members also to appear as an OECD Publication at the Special Session of the UN General Assembly.

Information Exchange: “Greening” on the Net

Environment Canada has established an Internet site on “greening” the OECD”. This site is intended to serve as a forum for OECD Member countries to inform the world on their “greening” government activities. Currently, the site is organised into 11 areas of action and contains information only on Canadian initiatives. Environment Canada will restructure the site to reflect the major elements of the Council Recommendation. (Note: the current location of country “flags” is only intended to demonstrate the graphic layout of the site, and does not represent the level of activity in any other country.)

Country	Green Procurement	Energy Conservation	Water Conservation	Human Resources Management	Compliance Promotion and Assurance	Climate Change	Waste Management	Fleet Management	Land Management	Environmental Management Systems	Communications	Country
Australia												Australia
Austria												Austria
Belgium												Belgium
Canada												Canada
Czech Republic												Czech Republic
Denmark												Denmark
EU												EU

How to access the site: The site is presently located at <http://www.globalx.net/envcan/index.html>. This address leads to a dialogue box. Type (Username): envcan [tab] **Note: Do not use return**, then (Password): green. This procedure brings you to a general information page. Click on the Français or English buttons to move on to the matrix. Click on any subject area for Canada to see an example of the type of information currently on the website. You can also access the matrix page directly by using the address: <http://www.globalx.net/envcan/qx.html>.

OECD Council Recommendation on Improving the Environmental Performance of Government

THE COUNCIL,

Having regard to Article 5 b) of the Convention on the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development of 14th December 1960;

Recognising the importance of governments of Member countries demonstrating leadership by achieving the highest standards of environmental performance in their facilities and operations;

Considering that governments are significant consumers and producers of goods and services, and that through their procurement policies and improving the environmental performance of their facilities and operations, they can help to bring about more sustainable patterns of consumption and production;

Mindful of the commitments made by Member countries in 1992 at the UN Conference on Environment and Development to change patterns of consumption and production and to review and improve Government procurement policies, and of the Work Programme adopted by the Decision of the Third Session of the UN Commission on Sustainable Development in May 1995;

Noting also that improving the environmental performance of government facilities and operations can have positive effects and benefits beyond the environmental sphere, including the reduction of operating costs and the creation of employment;

Aware that G-7 Ministers of Environment, meeting in Hamilton, Canada, in May 1995, emphasised their commitment to improving the environmental performance of their governments' operations, and called upon the OECD to support and broaden their efforts;

I. RECOMMENDS that Member countries should develop and apply strategies for continually improving the environmental performance of their governments by integrating environmental considerations into all facets of government operations and facilities, including related decision-making processes.

II. RECOMMENDS to this effect that Member countries should:

(i) identify goals and set targets and time frames for optimising the use of energy, water and materials in day-to-day operations, in particular through reduction, re-use, recycling and recovery measures;

(ii) encourage the efficient and optimal use and conservation of natural resources and minimise the generation of waste in the design, construction, renovation and decommissioning of government buildings and facilities;

(iii) establish and implement policies for the procurement of environmentally sound products and services for use within governments;

(iv) apply sound management principles, and in particular environmental management system approaches, at each stage of the development and operation of government-owned or operated facilities;

(v) establish appropriate systems to monitor progress and evaluate strategies for improving environmental performance;

(vi) apply systematic analysis and, as appropriate, economic evaluation and environmental impact assessment procedures to the selection of:

- major public investment projects;
- incentive and disincentive instruments for improving efficiency; and,
- technologies to enhance environmental performance.

III. Further RECOMMENDS that Member countries should:

(i) establish effective mechanisms for consultation and co-ordination among ministries and agencies to facilitate the integration of environmental considerations with other considerations in decision-making processes related to government operations and facilities;

(ii) develop the awareness of government officials to environmental considerations through, for example, the establishment and development of training programmes, awareness-raising incentives and awards programmes, codes of practice, directives and regulations;

(iii) encourage and promote actions at all other levels of government and the public sector to continually improve the environmental performance of their operations and facilities and to observe the same high standards as central Government in this regard;

(iv) co-operate in pilot projects, involving as appropriate the private sector, related to procurement practices and to the environmentally sound management of government facilities and operations;

(v) exchange views on a regular basis and share data and information on the results of their efforts to improve the environmental performance of their governments and to give effect to this Recommendation.

IV. INVITES the Environment Policy Committee to:

(i) support efforts by Member countries to improve the environmental performance of government operations and facilities by, *inter alia*, facilitating the process of information sharing, for example through collecting and disseminating “best practice” in Member countries;

(ii) monitor, assess and report on Member country implementation of this Recommendation, in particular by means of the OECD’s Programme of Country Environmental Performance Reviews; and,

(iii) report to the Council on the state of progress in implementing this Recommendation, and on any barriers to further progress, within three years following its adoption.

V. Further INVITES the Environment Policy Committee to support, as appropriate, for instance through provision of advice and expertise, the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development in the improvement of its own environmental performance, as set out in Council Resolution C(96)40/FINAL.

**OECD WORKSHOP
ON IMPROVING THE ENVIRONMENTAL PERFORMANCE OF GOVERNMENT**

Paris, 8-9 October 1996

LIST OF PARTICIPANTS

AUSTRIA

Mr. Andreas TSCHULIK
Federal Ministry of Environment
Head of Department II/3
Stubenbastei 5
A-1010 Vienna

Mr. Gerhard OMERSU
Federal Ministry of Environment
Director of Department for International Affairs
Stubenbastei 5
1010 Vienna
Tel: (43) 1.515.22.16.11
Fax: (43) 1.515.22.76.26

BELGIUM

Mr. Ulrik LENAERTS
Ministry of the Flemish Community
AMINAL
Belliardstraat 14-18
1040 Brussels
Tel: (32) 2 507 3027
Fax: (32) 2 507 6732

CANADA

Mr. Berny LATREILLE (**Speaker**)
Corporate Manager, "greening" Operations
Corporate Services
Environment Canada
Les Terrasses de la Chaudière
10, rue Wellington, 4 étage
Hull, Québec KIA OH 3
Tel: (1 819) 997.4218
Fax: (1 819) 997.1781
Email: latreilleb@ncrsv2.am.doe.ca

CANADA (continued)

Mme Marie-Martine LONGTIN
Permanent Delegation of Canada to OECD
15 bis rue de Franqueville
75116 Paris
Tel: (33) 1.44.43.20.31

FRANCE

Mr. Michel LEBLOND (**Speaker**)
Chargé de Mission
auprès du Directeur Général
de l'Administration et du D'EVELOPPEMENT
Ministère de l'Environnement
20, Avenue de Ségur
75302 Paris
Tel: (33.1) 42.19.20.30
Fax: (33.1) 42.19.18.33

Mme Geniève VERBRUGGE
Chargée de mission
Service des Affaires Internationales (DGAD)
Ministère de l'Environnement
20, avenue de Ségur
75302 PARIS/Paris 07SP
Tel (33) 1.42.19.17.75
Fax: (33) 1.42.19.17.72
Email: sail@environnement.gouv.fr

GERMANY

Dr. Anita BREYER (**Speaker**)
G14 - Bundesministerium für Umwelt
Naturschutz und Reakorsicherheit
Postfach 12 06 29
D-53048 BONN
Tel: (49) 228.305.2452
Fax: (49) 228.305.3524

GERMANY (continued)

Mr. Reinhard PEGLAU
Federal Environment Agency
Department of Economics
Bismarckplatz 1
D-14193 Berlin
Tel: (49) 30.23 145732
Fax: (49) 30.23.15638

Mrs. Ute MINKE-KOENIG
Consellor
Delegation of Germany to the OECD
5, rue Léonard de Vinci
75116 Paris
Tel: (33) 1 44 17 16 06
Fax: (33) 1 45 01 29 77

HUNGARY

Dr. Istvan POMAZI
Senior Advisor
Ministry of Environment and Regional Policy
1011 Fő utca 44-50
P.O. Box 351
1394 Budapest
Tel: (36) 1.201 22 08
Fax: (36) 1.201 23 61

Ms. Isabella BARATI
Environment Economist
Ministry of Finance
Tel: (36) 1.327.24.07
Fax: (36) 1.327.68

JAPAN

Mr. Tetsuro FUJITSUKA (**Speaker**)
Deputy Director
Strategic Environmental Planning Division
Planning and Coordination Bureau
Environment Agency, Government of Japan
1-2-2 Kasumigaseki, Chiyoda-ku
Tokyo 100
Tel: (81) 3.3581.3397
Fax: (81) 3.3581.5951
Email: tetsuro-fujitsuka@eanet.go.jp
byb02232@niftyserve.or.jp

JAPAN (continued)

Mr. Naoya TSUKAMOTO
First Secretary
Japanese Delegation to the OECD
11, avenue Hoche
75008 Paris
Tel: (33) 1.53.76.61.82
Fax: (33) 1.45.63.05.44
Email: QZW01457@niftyserve.or.jp

MEXICO

Dr. Juan Carlos BELAUSTEGUIGOITIA
Head of Economic and Social Studies
Ministry of Environment, Natural Resources & Fisheries
Lateral Anillo Periférico Sur 4209, Segundo Piso
Fracc. Jardines de la Montana, Tlalpan
14210 México D.F.
Tel: (525) 628 08 47
Fax: (525) 628 06 49
Email: hacz@servidor.unam.mx

Dr. German GONZALEZ-DAVILA
Representative of Ministry of Environment
4, rue de Galliéra
75116 Paris
Tel: (33.1) 53 67 86 18
Fax: (33.1) 47 20 07 91
Email: germang@world-net.sct.fr

NETHERLANDS

Mr. Jos TONK
Ministry of Economic Affairs
P.O. Box 20101
2500 EC The Hague
Tel: (31) 70.379.7354
Fax: (31) 70 379.7404

Ms. Marina de GIER
Ministry of Housing, Spatial Planning
and Environment
Directorate for the Environment
IBPC/650
P.O. Box 30945
2500 GX The Hague
Tel: (31) 70.339.4570
Fax: (31) 70.339.1293

NORWAY

Mr. Egil BERG
Adviser
Ministry of Environment
Myntgt.2
P.O. Box 8013 Dep.
0030 Oslo
Tel: (47) 22.24.58.55
Fax: (47) 22.24.95.63

Mrs. Torild SKOGSHOLM
Adviser
Ministry of Environment
Myntgt.2
P.O. Box 8013 Dep.
0030 Oslo
Tel: (47) 22 24 60 58
Fax: (47) 22 24 95 63

Mrs. Mona TROEN
Project Manager
Ministry of Government Administration
P.O. Box 8003 Dep
0030 Oslo
Tel: (47) 22 24 46 38
Fax: (47) 22 24 95 17

Mrs. Birgit HERNES
Adviser
Ministry of Industry and Energy
P.O. Box 8014 Dep
0030 Oslo
Tel: (47) 22 24 66 11
Fax: (47) 22 24 66 29

SWEDEN

Ms. Kerstin BRUNNSTROM
Political Advisor
Ministry of Environment
10333 Stockholm
Tel: (46) 8.405.2269
Fax: (46) 8.21.9628

UNITED KINGDOM

Mr. John S. STEVENS (**Chairman**)
Department of Environment
Head of Environment Protection
Strategy Division
Room A 126
43, Marsham Street
London SW1P 3EB
Tel: (44) 171.276.8599
Fax: (44) 171.276.8430

Ms. Sally BURLINGTON (**Speaker**)
Economic Adviser
Head, Housing, Urban & Environment Team
HM Treasury
Whitehall
London SW1
Tel: (44) 171.270.5762
Fax: (44) 171.270.5741

Mrs. S.M. DEVILLE
Environmental & Energy Awareness Division
Department of the Environment
Room C11/07
2, Marsham Street
London SW1P EB
Tel: (44) 171.276.3777
Fax: (44) 171.276.4739

Mr. David WALWYN
First Secretary
Delegation of United Kingdom to OECD
19, rue de Franqueville
75116 Paris
Tel: (33) 1.45.24.98.36
Fax: (33) 1.45.24.98.37

UNITED STATES

Mr. Jim EDWARD (**Speaker**)
USEPA
Director, Planning, Prevention & Compliance Staff
Federal Facilities Enforcement Office
Mailcode: 2261A
401 M Street. SW
Washington DC 20460
Tel: (1 202) 564.2462
Fax: (1 202) 501.0069
Email: Edward.James@EPAMAIL.EPA.GOV

UNITED STATES (continued)

Mr. Breck MILROY
First Secretary
Permanent Delegation of the US to OECD
19, rue de Franqueville
75775 Paris Cedex 16
Tel: (33.1) 45 24 74 24
Fax: (33.1) 45 24 74 80

EUROPEAN COMMISSION

Mr. J.J. GROENENDAAL
Adviser
European Commission
Directorate General XI
Environment Nuclear Safety
and Civil Protection
Rue de la Loi 200
B-1049 Bruxelles
BELGIUM
Tel: (32) 2.299.22.71
Fax: (32) 2.299.41.23

Mme Anna de RUITER
European Commission
DG XI.E.4
Rue de la Loi 200
BU-5 2/124
B-1049 Bruxelles
BELGIUM
Tel: (32) 2.295.12.52
Fax: (32) 2.296.39.80
Email: anna.de-ruiter@dg11.cec.be

OBSERVER COUNTRIES**KOREA**

Mr. Byung-Seong CHUN
Korean Embassy
OECD Office in Paris
2/4 rue Louis David
75016 Paris
Tel: (33) 44.05.20.50
Fax: (33) 47.55.86.70

Mr. Kang-Ho PARK
Korean Embassy
OECD Office in Paris
2/4 rue Louis David
75016 Paris
Tel: (33) 44.05.20.50
Fax: (33) 47.55.86.70

POLAND

Mr. Czeslaw WIECKOWSK
Director
Environmental Policy Department
Ministry of Environmental Protection,
Natural Resources and Forestry
pl. Wawelska 52/54
00-922 WARSZAWA
Tel: (48) 22.25.47.84
Fax: (48) 22.25.87.61

OECD ENVIRONMENT DIRECTORATE

2 rue André Pascal
75775 Paris Cedex 16
France

Fax: 33 1 45 24 78 76

Jeremy EPPEL
Counsellor
E-mail jeremy.eppel@oecd.org

Tel 33.1.45.24.79.13

Christian AVEROUS
Head of Division
State of the Environment Division
E-mail christian.averous@oecd.org

Tel 33.1.45.24.98.19

Elaine GEYER-ALLELY
Consultant, Director's Office
E-mail elaine.geyer-allely@oecd.org

Tel 33.1.45.24.79.36

Philippe CRIST
Consultant, Director's Office
E-mail philippe.crist@oecd.org

Tel 33.1.45.24.13.80

Carlo PESSO
Consultant,
Pollution Prevention and Control Division
E-mail carlo.pesso@oecd.org

Tel 33.1.45.24.16.82

Masoto HAYASHIKAWA
Consultant
Pollution Prevention and Control Division
E-mail masoto.hayashikawa@oecd.org

Tel 33.1.45.24.96.96