

MEETING MINUTES
WEPSI DESIGN SUBGROUP
11/14/01

Participants:

Holly Evans, EIA
Cate Gable, Global Futures
Heidi Hall, Region IX EPA
Kathy Hudson-Kearns, Portland State University
Patricia Jatczak, WA Dept. of Ecology
John Katz, Region IX EPA
Frank Marella, Sharp
Wayne Rifer, WEPSI (Recycling Advocates)
Vicky Salazar, Region X EPA
David Stitzhal NWPC (Full Circle Environmental)

FRANK MARELLA, SHARP ELECTRONICS

The meeting began by noting that Frank will be presenting at the WEPSI Design Subgroup meeting to be held in conjunction with the General Stakeholder meeting of WEPSI in Portland on December 12th. The group spent a little time suggesting topic areas they would like him to cover during that presentation.

The first suggested topic was, How is the information link made between the consumer and what OEMs put out to the consumer on the shelves, via advertising etc.?

Frank took a moment to respond, and noted that OEMs gather information via surveys and via other channels. In general, businesses want faster machines that use incrementally less energy. Individual consumers are primarily interested in price. Price concerns lead to product miniaturization, standardization of materials, etc. Such attributes help not only with price, but with environmental improvement as well.

Another question raised was how to get "green" marketing information out to customers. Frank noted that more "green" marketing is done in some markets than in others. When asked where such marketing efforts have been most successful, he noted that Japan seems particularly advanced. This is largely due to the cultural environment in Japan, where even convenience stores take the time to get ISO 14000 certified. He also referred to the Top Runner program whereby the government officially sanctions the products that are best in class, thereby raising the level of competition to achieve environmental improvement.

The question was then raised, If channels for influencing OEM design practices are to be implemented, what amount of lead time is needed. Frank noted that a 2 year timeframe is typical, especially if the product is very new technology. There are many other factors to be built into each product development cycle beyond environmental factors.

The final question suggested for Frank's December presentation asked for information on who the right contact person is in the product development cycle to get information on environmental attributes considered.

Frank committed to gathering what information he can, and incorporating it into his presentation.

CONTACTING RENEE ST. DENIS

* The group agreed to contact Renee to set up a time to interview her over the phone using a pre-set list of questions. The group agreed that the call would be a conference call, and once the date was set between Renee and the interviewer, other Sub Group members would be informed of the time so that whoever could make the call would be able to.

* Cate will take the lead on contacting Renee.

* The group then briefly discussed the question set for Renee. The general approach would recognize that she is in a unique position as an OEM with a recycler on site. Given this position, is there an opportunity for design changes to be motivated by information generated from the recycler. It was noted that Renee may say there is an opportunity but it is irrelevant given that consumers must drive design change. Or she may say that there is important feedback relevant to design considerations that only recyclers can provide. She may also have insight into what information does drive design. Finally, the suggestion was made to gather information from Renee on what realities/ barriers in the marketplace might be laid bare in the recycling process that could be addressed through design changes.

GENERAL DISCUSSION 'FEEDBACK LOOPS' AS A FOCUS FOR THE DESIGN SUBGROUP

Katz: Looking at information feedback loops seems like a valid approach to take. It can help us get beyond the academic question, and into implementation. The next step is to determine which loops we look at; what channels already exist. The information that comes in from Frank in December will be very helpful.

Jatczak: We are on a good track.

Gable: We will need to determine how much detail and specificity we need out of our explorations.

Rifer: This concept is working well for the Recycling WEPSI subgroup I am facilitating.

Evans: We need to develop hypothetical statements to test that could then lead us toward the development of action items.

Gable: We perhaps need to take a step back and ask if we are agreeing that we are trying to impact DfE. Is there a problem here? What is the problem we are trying to address?

Evans: DfE is happening. It will continue to happen. There is evidence that market share is increasing due to environmental attributes, such as lead-free and flame retardant free. Lead free will be standard within 10 years. Flat screens will be standard within 10 years. This is all happening, often in the name of environmental improvement, even though there is not always conclusive evidence that the new alternative is better for the environment.

There is a valid concern held by many stakeholders in the current electronics dialogue that environmental design improvements can be informed through better EOL management. However, such discussion and feedback loops would need to distinguish between current/future and historic waste.

Financing mechanisms being explored by NEPSI may include design incentives, but if the costs to consumers go up as a result, perhaps procurement or other approaches would be better tools for driving design improvements.

A key question is, how can signals be sent to the consumer. How do labels and standards fit in. Sony for example has gained considerable market share in Japan with their "lead-free" Discman. There is no cost differential between their product and comparable leaded products. There is some concern over definitions however because there is some lead in the product.

EOL input can be so late in coming vis-a-vis the design process, that its almost futile to drive design in this manner.

Rifer: There is a distinction to be made between individual companies making design improvements, and broad adoption across the industry of a certain design improvement.

Evans: Different companies focus on different places. Some, like HP, focus on EOL issues, energy efficiency is the strength and focus of other OEMs, yet others focus for example on coded plastics, like Apple.

Gable: DfE is a very broad topic. It can mean many complex things, and seems to fall into three realms:

- Manufacturing and Materials
- Use (e.g. energy)
- EOL/ DfD.

Evans: To view various design activities, go to eiae.org, FAQ section, look for the DfE compilation. Its a little out of date, but due to be updated this year. There are many complex trade-offs when talking environmental design. OEMs get nervous when non-experts start talking about design. The materials switched to for example don't always help with improved recyclability (e.g. Berillium).

Hall: The value of the dialogue should go both ways. The issue Evans just mentioned could be addressed if recyclers and OEMs were in more detailed communication. Both up-front design and EOL recycling considerations could be addressed.

Evans: While many on the phone likely applaud the current material phase-outs in Europe, they are moving too quickly. Not enough life cycle analysis has been done on the alternatives. Someone needs to develop a set of common sense criteria -- that do not effect the functionality of the product -- that can drive environmental improvement and decrease EOL costs. (Mercury, for example, would not be a candidate for this discussion given its link to functionality, energy savings, etc.)

Note from Stitzhal: This last point, raised by Evans, is key to the Sub Group's dialogue, and I am not certain I have captured it appropriately. Holly, please elaborate and elucidate. What attributes, etc. fall outside of the realm of "functionality" but fall inside the realm of an EOL discussion that our Subgroup could pursue? I also encourage others to weigh in here on how they interpret this suggestion, and how to incorporate it into our workplan (see below).

Stitzhal: There seem to be two themes emerging that could be focal points for the SWOT analysis:

- How information flows between recyclers and OEMs with regard to design issues.
- How information flows between consumers and OEMs regarding design issues.

Gable: Cate reiterated Wayne's point about individual company versus broad, industry-wide adoption of design changes.

Evans: We need to focus on setting definitions, labels, and other means for conveying information. For example, "lead free" right now is an unspecific term.

Rifer: Finding common sense, simple criteria would be a simple way to go. The issues seem to be clearer when looking just at DfEOL, keeping costs down, staying high on the hierarchy.

Holly: And when you stay away from areas that impact functionality.

Holly: She will be chairing a workshop at this year's IEEE that will try to bridge the gap between OEMs and recyclers. Rudolph Auer (Apple), Steve Skurnak (Micrometallics), and Michael Biddle? (APC?) will be participating.

Gable: We need to develop at least a fuzzy conclusion and timeline.