

Awakening the Sleeping Giant: Promoting Organizational Learning and Change in Public Environmental Agencies

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While it is generally recognized that environmental regulations provide industry with powerful incentives to not pollute, it is also well known that many regulations prevent companies from practicing cleaner production (CP) and pollution prevention (P2). A barrier to regulations that promote CP/P2 may well be environmental agency staff culture, attitude, knowledge, and comfort level with supporting pollution prevention. All too often agency staff are not been given the tools, skills, and knowledge to shift paradigms from pollution control to cleaner production/ pollution prevention.

The Lowell Center for Sustainable Production (the Center) and the Toxics Use Reduction Institute (TURI) are developing two methodological tracks to address this serious problem: an organizational intervention methodology for public agencies, and a CP/P2 training program designed specifically for environmental protection agency staff.

The Center has assisted two states in implementing the organizational intervention methodology, and will help at least one additional state before November, 1998. The process involves extensive interviews with agency staff, surveys, an intervention workshop, and follow-up. The goal of these interventions is increased incorporation of pollution prevention into the daily work and decision making of the agency staff.

The environmental protection agency staff training curriculum, which was funded by the US Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) and developed and piloted with the Massachusetts Department of Environmental Protection, will be available in the fall, 1998. The objective of this project is to expose environmental regulatory staff (i.e., permittees, enforcement and compliance assistance staff, policy developers, and rule and regulation writers) to emerging P2 technologies in various industries so that they can incorporate this knowledge into their routine job functions and ultimately stimulate and promote CP/P2. The curriculum has five tiers encompassing 10 training modules: basic multi-media training, process/sector training, pollution prevention in job function training, enhanced communications skill building, and information technology.

The presentation will discuss the Center's/Institute's experiences in promoting change in public agencies.

The Use of “Open Space/Collaborative Action” Methodology to Promote Change in Public Environmental Agencies: A Participatory Workshop

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It is well known that many environmental regulations prevent companies from practicing cleaner production (CP) and pollution prevention (P2). A barrier to regulations that promote CP/P2 may well be the pollution prevention culture and attitude of environmental regulatory agency staff.

Workshop purpose:

This workshop will give participants the opportunity to experience and skills to use “Open Space/Collaborative Action” methodology as a tool to promote a paradigm shift in environmental agency staff from pollution control to cleaner production/pollution prevention.

This one day workshop will engage participants in the theoretical grounding of the “Open Space/Collaborative Action” methodology, as well as case studies in its use in public environmental agencies. The workshop will then immerse participants in an “Open Space/Collaborative Action” experience, followed by a facilitated debriefing. Finally, workshop leaders will provide participants with the information and skills necessary to design an “Open Space/Collaborative Action.”

Workshop agenda:

- Description and theory of the “open space-collaborative action” methodology
- Experiencing an “Open Space-collaborative Action” session
- Debriefing participant experience
- Designing an “Open Space-Collaborative Action” meeting