

Abstracts

EMERGING TRENDS IN ENVIRONMENTAL POLICY

Abstract

In recent years environmental policy has changed quite drastically. More and more it has become clear that industry is not only part of the sustainability problem, but certainly also part of the solution. This understanding has changed the direction of environmental policy, it has changed the way in which environmental policy is made and implemented and therefore it has changed the relationships between governments, the private sector and NGOs. As a result new policy instruments have been developed (covenants, bubble concept, eco-taxes, environmental planning, voluntary programs). Also new kinds of policy arrangements have emerged (self-regulation, business participation, shared responsibility, network steering arrangements).

This workshop provides a forum for discussion about the effectiveness of new trends in environmental policy. The focus will be on evaluating the impact of new forms of environmental policy on private sector decisions that effect the environmental impact of production and consumption. The network allows us to bring a cross national perspective to this question, and to consider the transferability of experiments from one region to another

The workshop organizers will make very brief presentations about the trends in Europe and the U.S.. We are inviting conference attendees who research or practice in this area to contribute their perspectives. The organizers of the workshop are aiming at an edited book on major trends in environmental policy.

Organizers

DR. THEO DE BRUIJN
CSTM University of Twente
PO Box 217, 7500 AE Enschede, the
Netherlands
phone +31-53 489 4234 / fax +31-53 489
4850
e-mail: t.j.n.m.debruijn@cstm.utwente.nl

DR. VICKI NORBERG-
BOHM
Belfer Center for Science and
International Affairs
Harvard University
77 JFK St.
Cambridge, MA 02138
e-mail: vnb@mit.edu

EMERGING TRENDS IN ENVIRONMENTAL POLICY - U.S.A.

Vicki Norberg-Bohm
Director, Energy Technology Innovation Project
Belfer Center for International Affairs
Kennedy School Government
Harvard University

ABSTRACT

In the US, we are at the beginning of a process of reinvention of environmental policy. The legacy of the 1970s is largely a "command-and-control" system. By the mid-1980s, dissatisfaction with the current environmental policy system was widespread, with government, industry, and public interest groups all calling for reform. From the standpoint of the greening of industry, the largest critique was that while the standards-based policy system was often effective in pollution control, it did little to push pollution prevention. In addition to the above concerns about the effectiveness of a pollution control approach, the system was critiqued as being inefficient, inequitable, and unable to effectively set priorities.

Although specific critiques and proposed solutions were not shared by all stakeholders, there was a growing consensus that pollution prevention and the related concepts of clean production and design for environment would be important elements of efforts to address the range of critiques, and that the current set of environmental policies was not going to move us far enough in that direction. The reforms taking place in the U.S. environmental policy system can be categorized into three main approaches: regulatory reform, voluntary initiatives, and investments in technology development and diffusion. In this paper, these reforms are evaluated for their impact on the dissemination information, flexibility, and the strength of incentives. The focus is on federal level programs, with some mention of related state programs.

The chapter concludes with an evaluation of the set of reforms as a whole. This analysis suggests that these reforms offer first, albeit limited, steps. At the national level, we have made greater strides in process than in product policy; i.e. on environmentally conscious manufacturing rather than design. Moving toward a sustainable industrial society will require more than simply extending current initiatives. Rather, new approaches which provide stronger incentives and incorporate a life-cycle perspective will be needed.