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The International Conference & Exhibition on Life Cycle Assessment (*InLCA*): Tools for Sustainability

Hyatt Regency Crystal City, Arlington, Virginia, 25 – 27 April, 2000

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The goal of *InLCA* was to provide an international forum to explore and discuss the **various applications of the life cycle concept in environmental management and sustainability**. Co-hosted by the US Environmental Protection Agency and the Institute for Environmental Research & Education (IERE), the conference attracted 265 attendees (a little over one-half were from the US) and 10 exhibitors.

The first day of the program consisted of an opening plenary session in which speakers provided broad-based views on achieving goals of sustainability, the major challenges and opportunities the LCA community faces, and what government and private industry can do to better integrate environmental decision-making with a life-cycle basis. The speakers spoke very sincerely about the need for both industry and government to look broadly at their activities and the value that tools such as LCA offer to reach sustainability. The **keynote address** was presented by the Honorable Anders Wijkman, member of the EU Parliament representing Sweden. Mr. Wijkman highlighted several key issues in moving society toward sustainability, including elevating our efforts to evaluate resource efficiency, energy demands, and internalizing external environmental costs. He also mentioned the need to strengthen global governance and apply LCA systematically when evaluating environmental impact choices.

The following speaker was **Bas de Leeuw** of the United Nations Environment Program (UNEP). Mr. De Leeuw referred to the huge untapped potential for the use of LCA as a **decision-support tool**. Further, he encouraged outreach to the social scientists who are unfamiliar with LCA. With LCA as a key concept, LCA developers and social scientists should be collaborating on tool development.

Completing the morning session was **Marc Epstein** of Rice University who spoke toward the industrial view of applying life cycle thinking as a **tool for moving toward sustainability**. Mr. Epstein said a key challenge is to convince corporate management that there is value to the company in looking broadly at their activities. To communicate this, one must speak their language.

The afternoon plenary session included very informative talks on the **global issues of LCA** given by Joel Ann Todd, SCG, Paolo Frankl, University of Rome, Ron Williams, General Motors, Dan Fiorino, EPA, Kevin Brady, Five Winds, and Rita Schenck, EcoSense. It was very apparent that the messages presented by the plenary speakers enthused the meeting attendees. This enthusiasm was sustained throughout the three-day conference as attendees listened to the technical presentations given on the second and third days of the conference. Many people commented on the high quality and range of the presentations.

Approximately 70 technical presentations were scheduled across four parallel tracks in morning and afternoon sessions. The themes of the sessions were varied and were aimed toward applications of LCA:

- Pollution Prevention
- LCA Methodology Issues
- Software Tools
- Decision-Making Approaches
- LCA Case Studies
- Management & Regulatory Issues
- External Reporting & Communication
- Data Quality & Availability
- Measures of Sustainable Development
- Natural Resource Use
- Product & Process Development & Design

On the afternoon of the last day, a **wrap-up session** was held to solicit input from attendees for ideas on how to advance the adoption of life cycle assessment as a tool for achieving sustainability as well as suggestions for improving the format of future conferences. Regarding the advancement of LCA, there was a sense of general agreement that LCA is poised to take off as a technique with many applications; its usefulness needs to be promoted wherever appropriate. As in many general discussions on LCA methodology, there was a strong desire expressed to make LCA simpler. At the same time, the field is moving toward place-specific analyses which will require more detailed, site-specific data. Finally, the need for the LCA community to reach out to embrace related disciplines was recognized.

Format recommendations included 1) offering an introductory class on LCA with hands-on exercises, 2) making slide presentations available before the conference, 3) eliminating parallel tracks, or having no more than two, 4) have more exhibitions and assign dedicated display times, and 5) grouping posters by sessions with scheduled presentations.

With the tremendous success of this international conference and the intense interest of the attendees to learn more about LCA, **tentative plans are to host the next US-based LCA conference in July or August of 2002** (recognizing that a Life Cycle Management conference is to be held in Copenhagen in August 2001). **Seattle, Washington**, has been selected as a possible location. Plans will be coordinated with other organizations that hold similar conferences, such as SAE, IEEE, and SETAC.

The final program, abstract and presentation slides from speakers who submitted them can be found at IERE's website: www.iere.org.