

Corner: UNEP/SETAC Life Cycle Initiative

Meetings in Prague from 15 – 23 April 2003: A new momentum

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LCA as essential tool for integrated waste management in cities and regions with rapid growing economies

The European Commission recommended the 10 new EU countries to develop an integrated LCA-based approach concerning decisions on their waste management systems. Two billion tonnes of waste are produced every year within the former 15 member states of the European Union. Enlargement expands the Union in respect to economic growth but also to new waste challenges. Integrated Waste Management (IWM) and Life Cycle Assessment (LCA) are seen as essential tools in solving these challenges without shifting the problems elsewhere.

The European Commission organised a workshop and conference on Integrated Waste Management (IWM) and Life Cycle Assessment (LCA) in Prague, Czech Republic, on 13–16 April 2004 to promote these approaches in the 10 new EU countries. The event was organised in collaboration with UNEP, among others. Also on the global level, the presented approaches can be seen as essential possibilities to solve the waste management challenges of cities and regions with rapidly growing economies.

Presentations in the first conference session focused on the national strategies, tools, and practical lessons learnt from the application of

life cycle assessment and integrated waste management concepts for managing and reducing municipal wastes and associated impacts. The second session addressed practical issues: 1) data collection, data quality, and sensitivity issues and insights; 2) practical modelling techniques (screening, number of scenario iterations, etc.); and 3) the interpretation and communication of results to stakeholders. The third session focused on key methodological issues, their importance and suggestions for further progress.

In a keynote, Guido Sonnemann pointed out that a key task ahead for the Life Cycle Initiative is to promote and adopt a life-chain approach to materials management. This approach can help manufacturers and waste managers to optimise the overall system of energy, materials, and waste flow in close cooperation. For example, reverse manufacturing and design for recyclability remain theoretical elements if systems for the collection of waste products and actual recycling are not put in place. Possible co-operations and involvement in a planned future task force of the Life Cycle Initiative on 'Integrated Resource and Waste Management' were discussed with interested experts. There is a clear need for disseminating the lessons learnt on the global level and for a stronger involvement of developing countries in the ongoing developments.

Events of the Life Cycle Initiative in Prague

In conjunction with SETAC Europe conference

A meeting of the International Life Cycle Panel was held in Prague on 23 April. 16 persons representing UNEP and the partners as well as the Executive Committee attended this meeting. 3 additional persons contributed by telephone.

The chairman, Fritz Balkau from UNEP DTIE¹, firstly stressed the role of the ILCP² as management board and responsible body of the initiative. As first agenda point, the three programme leaders presented the start of the work programmes of the Task Forces which were well received. It was requested to adapt the Terms of References (ToRs) of the Task Forces in such a way that the milestones and deliverables will attract more attention, including potential applications of the deliverables, in practice.

A core element for each of the three programmes lies in their contribution to capacity building in developing countries. This includes active transfer of knowledge, skills, and easy-to-use methods:

- the analysis of potential benefits of using life cycle approaches in the environmental, economic as well as in the social domain,
- the analysis of existing barriers to life cycle approaches, including substantial costs and trade barriers, and
- institutional aspects.

Capacity building should also include the implementation of pilot projects, possibly in conjunction with the UNEP/UNIDO³ Cleaner Production Centres which exist in a number of developing countries. The programme manager will come up with a proposal of how to better structure capacity building in the initiative as a whole.

It was decided that all Task Forces have their own websites that will be accessible through the sites of the programmes and of the initia-

tive as a whole. These sites are to disseminate information and act as discussion fora for the work in the three programmes.

The relationship between the initiative and ISO has been elaborated further. The LCI and LCIA Task Forces are requested to provide suggestions for changes in the new standards within LCA (14040 and 14044) to be discussed in the new round which starts in 2005.

The day before the meeting of the ILCP, the majority of the Task Forces held informal meetings, discussing the start of their work programmes. In total, about 40 members participated. Formal decisions will be made in up-coming email-rounds or telephone conferences.

Likewise, Task Force meetings will be organised in Portland, following the symposium on the Sustainable Extraction, Use and Recycling of Natural Resources, taking place from November 15–18. The Task Force meetings will be held on Thursday afternoon, November 18. You are all welcomed to join these meetings, and of course to submit papers to the symposium itself (see the announcement in Int J LCA No. 2, pp. 74–75 (2004)). For the ILCP meeting itself, all Task Forces are requested to present one or two slides in order to inform the audience about their progress.

This note was prepared by the Executive Committee:

- Helias A. Udo de Haes, director
- Guido Sonnemann, secretary
- Konrad Saur, leader of LCM programme
- Greg Norris, leader of LCI programme
- Olivier Jolliet, leader of LCIA programme

UNEP/SETAC Partners partners in the Life Cycle Initiative are AIST (National Institute of Advanced Industrial Science and Technology), Japan, Alliance for Beverage Cartons and the Environment (ACE), Association of Plastics Manufacturers in Europe (APME), EcoRecycle Victoria, International Council on Mining and Metals (ICMM), General Motors, Governments of Canada, Germany, the Netherlands and Switzerland, and the CIRAI/ Government of Quebec.

¹ DTIE: Division of Technology, Industry, and Economics

² ILCP: International Life Cycle Panel

³ UNIDO: United Nations Industrial Development Organization