

Greening the Government
A Sustainability Conference for Government Officials
Sheraton Rittenhouse Hotel, Philadelphia
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Welcoming Remarks by John Howard

Welcome to the 2003 Greening the Government Conference at the Green Seal-certified Sheraton Rittenhouse Hotel in Philadelphia.

We have a great three days of speakers – including Bill McDonough later this morning, panels, and networking on sustainability and how we all can be, as EPA's Morris Winn calls us, evangelists for a greener America.

I want to extend a special thank you to EPA Region 3 and Regional Administrator Don Welsh for being our hosts this week, and for all the great things you're doing here. Region 3 is the lead on so many innovative, successful initiatives, including the pilots for the new Plug Into eCycling to collect old electronics; the first EPA facility to receive ISO 14001 certification, at the Fort Meade Environmental Science Center; your greener and less costly remodeled office space here in Philadelphia; and more.

Remembering our Successes, Focusing on our Challenges

We live in an incredible time in our nation's and the world's history. And as we gear ourselves up for climbing the tall mountain of problems that always seems to lie just ahead of us, it's important that we also remember the mountains we have already scaled.

We have made significant environmental progress over the last 30 years. Today, we know that environmental improvement and economic growth go hand in hand. For example:

- Since 1970, our economy has grown about 150%.
- During that time, emissions of key air pollutants are down about 30%, and continue to decline.
- More than 90% of all public drinking water systems today are safe, up significantly, and continuing to improve.
- Our energy use has grown at only one-fifth the rate of our economic growth.
- Renewable energy generation has grown about 30%.

- And our health is improving – life expectancy is a record 77.2 years – our national mortality and infant mortality rates are at all-time lows – and cancer and heart disease mortality continue to fall.

And yet we still face many environmental challenges. To maintain this progress, to tackle the problems we have not yet been able to solve, and to start thinking and acting sustainably, we have to do things differently – we have to develop advanced technologies, adopt innovative practices, work together as a team, and integrate policies and solutions across traditional disciplines (and silos).

Sustainability in the United States

We've been hearing about this lofty goal of sustainable development and sustainability now for a couple of decades – but have we made any progress?

The Yale professor and former EPA staffer Dan Esty has written that “sustainable development” has not worked because it is still just a phrase with no specific content. Several commentators believed that the recent World Summit on Sustainable Development in Johannesburg highlighted all the things we have not done.

Despite all that doom and gloom – and the mountains of problems staring us in the face – there are some bright rays of hope.

In developing countries, we know we can't just wave a magic wand and change conditions – the underlying circumstances first need to be improved for improvements to take root and grow. So the US and others are joining together to promote sustainable development around the world by first promoting stable, peaceful, and secure states that respect human rights, combat corruption, support the rule of law, open markets, and promote private enterprise. To meet developing nations' needs and meet the problems of formerly ineffective – if not wasted – billions of dollars in foreign aid, President Bush has proposed a Millennium Challenge Account that offers more money (\$15 billion, up \$5 billion, by 2006) in return for results and accountability. If they don't make timely improvements, the money will move to others. He's taking the same approach with HIV/AIDS, on which Congress acted last week to spend \$15 billion over the next 5 years on prevention and treatment primarily in Africa.

Growth and sustainable development cannot depend solely on aid, of course. Private sector investment and free trade are critical. And so the US has worked successfully to ensure – in several key trade and development agreements – that countries embrace, or at least accept, that private sector investment, public-private partnerships, good governance, accountability, and free trade are essential for sustainable development.

Stability, growth, and a healthy environment in developing countries are important for all of us. Accountability with taxpayers' money is important not just with our foreign spending but also here at home. To reach for sustainability, we first must be more efficient and able to measure our performance and progress. In the 2004 budget he submitted to Congress, President Bush stated: "We will continue to focus on getting results from federal spending. A federal program's measure of success is not its size, but the value it delivers."

We have the basic elements for sustainability already in the US, but we need to build on those and weave them together.

We need to know how we're doing, by agreeing to a common set of environmental and health indicators. And so we're working on that, here in the US and with other countries.

To improve environmental conditions and our quality of life, we have the opportunity and responsibility to use significantly cleaner operations. Energy is one of the most important opportunities for improvement. So we're working on hydrogen fuel cell technologies – seeking \$1.7 billion over the next 5 years and working with private sector and countries around the world. But that's going to take awhile, so we need to do something in the shorter term. So we're working on legislation to reduce emissions from power plants over the next two decades. And over an even sooner timeframe, we're requiring cleaner diesel and gasoline.

To get from here to sustainability, we have to have a plan for each stage. It's disingenuous of anyone to argue that we either should stay stuck where we are or should immediately jump to the future. And to successfully implement that plan and meet our performance objectives, we need agents of change like you.

Office of the Federal Environmental Executive

The federal government is moving forward to improve its own environmental compliance and performance, with the ultimate goal being sustainable operations.

President Bush has said that the federal government should lead by example, be a good neighbor, and be a good steward of our resources.

I've now had the privilege of working for President Bush for nearly seven years. I have seen his commitment to improving our quality of life, a strong focus on actually getting better results, a willingness to encourage innovation, and a personal ethic of stewardship – from making sure that the Texas Governor's Mansion was one of the first Austin facilities to sign up for the City's new renewable energy program – to his sustainably designed ranch house with its geothermal heating and cooling system and rainwater cistern – to the recent installation of the White House's first-ever solar electric system.

My position was initiated by the first President Bush to boost recycling within the federal government. President Clinton expanded that to do more on “green” purchasing. President Bush has now tasked me with expanding the office’s mission and activities.

Our mission today is to promote sustainable environmental stewardship throughout the federal government. To help facilities improve their environmental compliance and performance, we have six priority action areas: our historical core missions of recycling, waste prevention, and green procurement, as well as electronics stewardship, industrial ecology, sustainable buildings, and the strategic framework for all of this, environmental management systems.

In addition to offering training, education, guidance, best practices, and support, we also are trying to improve accountability through the use of scorecards. Our office issued a report to the President, with scorecards, last year, on how the federal government is doing in the energy and environmental arenas. By pulling together this information, we found that:

- We’re progressing toward our goal of having federal facilities implement an environmental management system by December 2005. To date, 19 federal facilities are registered to ISO14001 and another 200 are actively developing EMSs. – with hundreds more being trained.
- Total carbon emissions from federal facilities dropped 2.8 million metric tons over the last decade – like removing 2.1 million cars in a year.
- We’ve cut our energy intensity (BTUs per square foot) by nearly one-quarter (23%) since 1985, saving taxpayers \$1.4 billion.
- And just in the last two years, we’ve tripled our purchase of electricity from renewable energy sources, to 632 gigawatt hours, enough to serve 60,000 households for a year.

The report also makes 18 recommendations for the federal government to improve its stewardship – by building partnerships and enhancing education, improving accountability, budgeting for sustainability, building sustainable infrastructure, and continuing leadership. Along the way, we also found some wonderful individual stories.

For example, in the Department of Defense alone, the Navy is taking a life cycle approach to building submarines and ships, the Army is testing Hybrid Humvees, and those drones – unmanned aerial vehicles – that we heard so much about in Afghanistan and Iraq will soon be powered by fuel cells. As Fort Lewis’ General Hill stated, “We’re creating irreversible momentum for sustainability.”

Green Purchasing

To move toward sustainability, one of the most important aspects we're working on is our purchasing. The federal government annually purchases approximately \$250 billion worth of goods and services – and provides about the same amount to states and local governments for their programs. So what we buy can and does impact the market.

As our report highlights, many in the federal government are doing some great things. But to have federal purchasing officials buy green products as a matter of course, we need to do three things better: training, marketing, and integrating.

The federal government does not do a good job of providing information to purchasers on what they're required to do, let alone what they could be doing. My vision is that we should be much more systematic about green product training. One step our office has initiated is to work with the Office of Personnel Management to include a green product component to their federal employee electronic training portal, golearn.gov.

President Bush tells a great story about how in 1978 he ran for Congress in West Texas and got trounced. He asked an elderly lady why he lost and, among several reasons, she said, "Because you never asked me for my vote." I believe that Americans are not buying green products or recycling or doing any number of environmentally responsible things simply because we're not persistently asking people to do those things – and other people are asking us to do lots of other things. So we need a sustained marketing campaign on green purchasing to make any real improvement in our effectiveness.

We also need integration across programs. We have lots of green product programs now just in the federal government – Energy Star, comprehensive procurement guidelines for recycled content products, environmentally preferable products, alternative fuels and vehicles, and biobased products. Several of these are mature programs and have much to offer the others. We also have some new programs that should be able to learn from these existing programs – like the new Federal Electronics Challenge that seeks to help federal folks buy, use, and dispose of their electronics in a more environmentally responsible manner. And states, communities, and businesses are doing a great deal, too.

We at least have to get the program folks and the procurement folks talking the same language, so that it's as easy as possible to buy green products. My vision is that we increasingly will bring together these products and programs into a bigger picture of green products.

The best examples of green purchasing in the federal government have been the result of teamwork – of multidisciplinary teams – from facilities, acquisition, and program staff. We need to do more of that.

So, on March 11, we brought together the leads for all the national green product programs from the different agencies at CEQ to brainstorm about how to work together better and how to help each other better get our message out to purchasers. We're in the first stages of this effort and now need to spend time with the purchasing community to find out better what they want and need.

Green Building

Another important part of the federal government's sustainability efforts is our green building work. We have several policies in place that have helped us achieve some early successes, such as the Energy Policy Act of 1992, various executive orders, and individual agency policies. Executive Order 13123, for example, requires federal agencies to "apply [sustainable design] principles to the siting, design, and construction of new facilities."

And several agencies now require that their new buildings and major renovations use the U.S. Green Building Council's rating system, Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design, or LEED – or a similar rating system – including EPA, the National Park Service, the Army, the Navy, the Air Force, and the General Services Administration. And the White House Office of Management and Budget's guidance for federal agencies in preparing their budgets, Circular A-11, was revised in 2002 to encourage agencies to use LEED.

Just about everywhere you look, the federal government is working on green buildings. DOE's Federal Energy Management Program, EPA, the National Park Service, GSA, DOD, and others all have information about their green building efforts on their websites. The Pentagon renovation has received much recognition for its green attributes, including winning this year's Presidential Federal Energy Management Award. On Earth Day, I announced the four winners of the first White House Closing the Circle awards for Sustainable Design and Green Building. More than 100 federal buildings are now Energy Star rated. More than 60 Federal buildings are undergoing the LEED certification process, and seven federal buildings have been LEED certified already. And Morris Winn will tell you more shortly about all the great green building activities EPA has underway.

Recently, EPA's Ken Sandler – during some time he spent in our office – surveyed the obstacles that the federal government faces in doing even more sustainable building: barriers in our budget rules and insufficient funding, insufficient education and tools, a need for additional research, and a lack of a clear, comprehensive federal policy direction. So the next step for us, and for you, is to truly work together to start overcoming these hurdles.

There are many options and opportunities, of course, and in the coming weeks we will be addressing which recommendations to proceed with. But we know we

at least need to develop robust federal green building case studies – do we really save money, and over what time period? Are workers really more productive? How much pollution is reduced? How much energy really is saved? And more.

Thankfully, DOE and the federal interagency sustainability working group they lead are now developing a High Performance Buildings Case Study Database and a Business Case for Sustainable Design, which are beginning to reveal the answers. We need your help to ensure we have strong data.

We know we need to improve the use of life cycle costing, so that the traditional focus on just the upfront construction costs is balanced with the benefits and reduced costs of high performance green buildings over time. The Navy is one example of an agency working to do just that. But we need more of these examples and case studies documenting them to convince the funders that this approach really works.

And we need to work together to do all this. We're always looking for ways to get new energies flowing, get ideas and models and successes transferred from one group to another, and to continue to move the ball forward. And we need better networks – and fewer silo-huggers – to do that.

I can't tell you how many times, in my brief tenure in the federal government, I've talked to someone in one part of an agency who was working on a great project or had achieved some great result – and very few others knew about it, let alone were taking it and using it.

And when we ask others outside the federal government to do something – whether its compliance with a particular RCRA CFR subparagraph or volunteering for WasteWise – but our own agency doesn't do that thing, then it only follows that most are simply not going to do it.

So we need to do a better job of working together – within agencies (yes, that's still an issue), with other agencies, the private sector, organizations, states, and communities.

That's why the work of the current interagency sustainability working group and the Federal Network for Sustainability is so important – and why still other partnerships are needed. I'm pleased that Al Hurt from the Federal Network for Sustainability is able to be here to talk later about taking this generally west coast network and seeing what we can do here. Only by working together can we truly overcome these barriers.

Environmental Management Systems

Whew. That's a lot going on and a lot to do – and that's just the tip of the iceberg. So you and everybody else says, I can't keep track of all those things, let alone do them. That's where management systems come in.

Some use an environmental management system, or EMS, to handle myriad issues, others to improve compliance, some to cut costs or reduce potential liabilities, and still others to improve performance.

I like EMSs for two reasons. One, they are flexible enough to let you create your own that works for your operation and covers what you need to have covered. And two, they require you to bring together all the different groups from your operations to work together, so it's not just the environmental folks' work but everyone's – and once people start working together and stop hugging their silos, who knows what good and creative things will start happening.

Closing

Sustainability is about working to creatively address the problems of tomorrow, today. Sustainability may not be a word most Americans use today – but Americans nevertheless expect their government – and businesses – to comply with the law, avoid costly mistakes, be efficient and effective, invest in people and innovation, be good citizens, and look to the future.

Through our work back at the office and our time at home with our families and in our communities, we have the chance to make a difference every day. Our task at this conference is to make the most of these next three days – to learn as much as we can, to share our successes and lessons learned, and to prepare an action plan for how we're going to be the agents of change needed to make sustainability happen.

Thank you.