

Executive Summary

North American Sustainable Consumption Alliance Planning Group: Proceedings from the First Meeting

Lowell, Massachusetts

October 11-12, 2001

On October 11-12, 2001, the Lowell Center for Sustainable Production at the University of Massachusetts Lowell hosted the inaugural meeting of the North American Sustainable Consumption Alliance planning group. The objective of the meeting was to bring together key people who are actively involved in promoting sustainable consumption in Canada, Mexico, and the United States in order to begin developing a plan for working together more collaboratively. The United Nations Environment Programme assisted in the development and design of the meeting, which was inspired by UNEP's initiative to organize and support sustainable consumption roundtables worldwide.

The following organizations participated in the meeting: U.S. EPA, Environment Canada, SEMARNAT (Mexico's federal environmental agency), Global Action Plan, Consumers Union, Green Seal, Integrative Strategies Forum, Center for A New American Dream, University of Sonora (Mexico), RAJY (Youth Environmental Network of the Yucatan), Canadian Centre for Pollution Prevention, and the International Council for Local Environmental Initiatives. The following organizations provided support for the meeting: the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), Los Alamos National Laboratory, the North American Commission for Environmental Cooperation, Environment Canada, SEMARNAT, and the Lowell Center for Sustainable Production.

After engaging in a brief discussion of what is meant by the term "sustainable consumption," participants took part in a small group exercise in which they articulated their vision of sustainable consumption for their respective countries. By highlighting similarities and differences among the countries' visions of sustainable consumption, this exercise helped lay the foundation for the development of a common North American vision for sustainable consumption.

Next, in a large group format, participants talked about why and how to collaborate. It was determined that a strategic partnership could help participating organizations learn about one another's initiatives, exchange ideas and viewpoints, develop a common and coordinated strategy around sustainable consumption, and provide input into policymaking processes. Participants agreed to a four-part strategy framework for raising awareness in the short term and effecting broad-based change in the longer term: Level One - information exchange and *ad hoc* collaboration, Level Two - policy alignment where appropriate, Level Three - collaboration on larger projects, and Level Four - establishment of a common policy framework and adoption of shared language to address sustainable consumption issues.

Outcomes from the meeting include:

- Selection of a formal name for future collaborative efforts: "the North American Sustainable Consumption Alliance";
- Preliminary discussion of core Alliance objectives and activities;
- Identification of possible next steps for the Alliance and for individual organizations;
- Identification of possible additional key stakeholders to be included in further discussions about the Alliance; and
- Commitment to participate in electronic discussions and future meetings to refine the Alliance's objectives and strategies.

Comments strongly emphasized the importance of working together as a community to promote sustainable consumption, even as each organization pursues its individual path. Participants reiterated the need for the Alliance to stay under "common ownership" (rather than become the proprietary project of any one entity) and to use existing structures or mechanisms where available and appropriate.

Participants expressed the desire to sustain the momentum generated by the meeting. In the short term, through electronic communication, participants agreed to finalize the selection of the Alliance's objectives, refine the language of the Alliance's draft Mission Statement, and establish eligibility criteria for joining the Alliance. Discussions are also underway to organize subsequent meetings in Canada and Mexico. These meetings will provide the opportunity for strategy development as well as in-depth exploration of 2-3 key sustainable consumption themes/issues.