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**North American Sustainable Consumption Alliance Workgroup:  
Proceedings from the Second Meeting**

Montreal, Quebec

June 12-14, 2002

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 order to begin developing a plan for working together more collaboratively. The First Meeting initiated the groundwork for macro discussions on ‘what direction do we want to be going in?’ which in turn lead to outlining a vision of sustainable consumption. There were also limited micro discussions on ‘how do we get there’ which in turn involved articulating how to operationalize the vision. Continuing these two discussions in a second face-to-face meeting was seen as necessary in order to move the issue of sustainable consumption in North America forward.

On June 12-14, 2002, the Canadian Centre for Pollution Prevention and Environment Canada hosted the second meeting of the North American Sustainable Consumption Alliance Workgroup. The first objective of the meeting was to formulate strategic plans to move the issue of sustainable consumption in North America forward from a macro and micro perspective. The second objective of the meeting was to consult with North American organizations active in sustainable consumption on a path to move sustainable consumption onto the North American political agenda. These proceedings summarize the discussions and outcomes from that meeting.

## **I. Participants and Sponsors**

Meeting participants from the inaugural North American Sustainable Consumption Alliance Workgroup meeting provided suggestions on others who may have an interest in participating in the second Alliance meeting. Thirteen additional Canadian organizations, fourteen additional American organizations and twenty-eight additional Mexican organizations were sent e-mails and hard copy invitations.

A full listing of those attending the second meeting is included in Appendix A. Many organizations expressed an interest in attending but were unable to do so.

Support for the meeting was provided by: the North American Commission for Environmental Cooperation, Environment Canada’s National Office of Pollution Prevention, Canadian Centre for Pollution Prevention and the Lowell Center for Sustainable Production.

## II. Macro Discussions: Common Vision and Framework

The macro discussions focused on the vision of the group and the intended path forward. The Workgroup then reviewed the national visions of sustainable consumption articulated at the first meeting. Full details of each country's national vision can be found within the proceedings from the first meeting.

Participants were asked to brainstorm themes common to the national sustainable consumption visions. These themes included: trilateral effort that provides a strong network and coordinated approach from the governments of all three countries; incentives for manufacturers; subsidy/tax reform; education/awareness that compels consumers to take action; provision of tools to make it easy for citizens; clarity and trust of information; connection with pollution prevention/cleaner production on the design side; and focusing on governments because they are a significant purchaser (account for about 18% of all goods and services purchased).

It was then suggested that the discussions focus on the potential roles of different players in society, in an effort to outline a framework for the common vision. By articulating the roles of different actors in society, we begin to paint a clearer picture of 'what the vision will look like' and how various actors will serve to advance the vision of sustainable consumption. A summary of potential roles is provided below.

### ACADEMICS

- Serve as translators

### NGOS

- Formulate pressures early on to get specific changes on the agenda of policy/decision makers
- Whistleblower
- Put issues on the table that government/industry aren't willing to raise, i.e. subsidy reform as a politically difficult issue
- Advocacy
- Put forth alternatives
- Raise consumer awareness

### INDUSTRY / PRODUCER

- Share responsibility
- More accountability
- Create new markets, new sustainable options/technologies
- Disclose information in a more transparent way
- Access to options and increased awareness
- More active role

## GOVERNMENT

- Provide leadership through consumption patterns
- Support new markets / green business
- Disseminate information, not overly technical
- Long-term policy making
- Acknowledging consumers power, amplifying the voice of consumers
- Work with food production systems and other producers
- Privatization not the silver bullet

## POLICY MAKERS

- Look long-term with enhanced responsibilities

## LOCAL GOVERNMENT

- Planning of a City to facilitate low-impact consumption patterns

## CITIZENS

- Empowered through information to change own practices and influence society
- Use and trust tools to make choices
- Expansion of 'Right to Know'
- Consumers less passive
- Provided more sustainable options
- Access to easily understood outreach material

These discussions then led participants to uncover similarities between the cultures of all three countries. The cultural similarities that exist between Canada and the U.S. were present in Mexico but to a lesser extent. Similar challenges noted were: changing the cultural ideal of affluence and the perversity of eco-efficient products (i.e. lower manufacturing costs result in lower consumer prices, and as a result increase the potential for greater volume and consumption). Participants also raised the challenge that sustainable livelihoods (i.e. jobs) need to be part of the equation in any changes that are made to encourage sustainable consumption.

### **III. Macro Discussions: Develop appropriate language and framework to discuss Sustainable Consumption**

Participants engaged in small groups for a brainstorming exercise where the task was to develop appropriate language and framework to discuss sustainable consumption. At the end of the exercise, each group presented their findings.

Canadian Centre for Pollution Prevention staff and Lowell Center staff served as facilitators and recorders for each of the four small groups' discussions. Appendix B provides raw data from flip charts used by each group. (Note: The raw data from each of the four groups reflects a collection of diverse viewpoints expressed during a brainstorming exercise rather than the official stance of any participating agency or organization. Inclusion of a statement in this summary does not imply consensus agreement nor endorsement by any particular meeting participant.)

At the end of the brainstorming exercise, Jack Luskin of the Lowell Center took some time to convey how the vision and strategy relate to micro-level discussion on specific projects. The development of a common vision and strategy is seen as more of a conceptual exercise that provides direction on ‘where we want to go’ as an Alliance. The micro-level discussions on project ideas are seen as essential elements to support or operationalize the vision and strategy.

#### **IV. Micro Discussions: “Open Space” Meeting Results**

The micro discussions focused on action items to operationalize the vision. Lowell Center staff introduced the concepts behind Open Space meetings as a means to engage participants in formulating a list of potential projects. Background information on how Open Space meetings work can be found in Appendix C.

After the concepts behind “open space” meeting technology were introduced, group tasks and deliverables were outlined as follows:

- Agree on the definition and scope of the initiative
- Develop an Action Plan
- Develop a Summary Sheet
- Develop a 2 minute commercial to “sell” the initiative to others

Through the use of “open space” technology, the following group project ideas were developed:

- 1) North American Alliance Survey: Have the North American Alliance create an exhaustive survey of Sustainable Production & Consumption activities & projects. Collective and country-specific (eventually sector / industry specific too).
- 2) Sustainable Consumption / Sustainable Production Conference: Organize a working conference: “Securing the Future: A SC/SP Working Conference.”
- 3) National Policy Framework Campaign: Develop a campaign in each country to get the government to realize their 1992 commitment / obligation at Rio to develop a national policy framework on sustainable production and consumption.
- 4) Interactive Consumption Web Site: Create an interactive website that shows the implications (social, ecological or economic) of consumption.
- 5) Tri-National Buyers Campaign: Develop a tri-national campaign on the power of purchasing aimed at government, institutions, investors, and other consumers, using various projects as examples.
- 6) Government Procurement: Develop a plan to get national government (and eventually state/provincial and local) to set measurable objectives for sustainable procurement.
- 7) EnviroBuyer.com: Create a tri-national consumer database on the web.

- 8) Sustainable Households: Develop interactive materials that show the contrast between “sustainable: and “unsustainable” households and provide specific information about environmentally preferable products/services/behaviors. Develop policy materials for governments about sustainable households.

More detailed outlines of the group projects can be found within Appendix D. Projects that were suggested within the open space meeting, but were not worked on can also be found within Appendix D.

## **V. Discussion on List of Projects Generated**

Participants were asked to identify opportunities to prioritize or combine projects from the list of eight generated from the ‘open space’ meeting. This proved challenging as participants expressed the need for projects that encourage involvement, provide a high degree of visibility and build a natural progression for the Workgroup.

Participants agreed that project #5 (Trinational Buyers Campaign) and project #6 (Government Procurement) could be combined into one project. Many participants agreed that natural linkages occurred between project #1 (North American Alliance Survey), project #2 (Sustainable Consumption / Sustainable Production Conference), and project #4 (Interactive Consumption Web Site). It was suggested that an initial proposal be developed to seek funding for conducting a North American Alliance survey and then host the information on a North American Sustainable Consumption Alliance website. Below is a revised list of projects:

- 1) Interactive Consumption Website
- 2) Sustainable households
- 3) Tri-national Buyers Campaign & Government Procurement
- 4) National Policy Framework Campaign
- 5) North American Alliance Survey
- 6) Sustainable Consumption / Sustainable Production Conference
- 7) EnviroBuyer.com

In terms of timing, all of the projects with the exception of ‘EnviroBuyer.com’ were seen as projects where work could start immediately. Participants agreed that ‘EnviroBuyer.com’ was more involved in terms of technical coordination and it was suggested that it should be postponed for future consideration.

An agreed upon next step was to build a more detailed project description for all original eight projects. Volunteers from each project group were solicited to provide further details on each project including: scope, goals, background research on what activities/initiatives have been undertaken, required resources and potential stakeholders. Staff from Lowell drafted a summary of group projects that can be used as a starting point (see Appendix D).

Working groups were suggested as a possible configuration for future work through the North American Sustainable Consumption Alliance.

Working groups could be organized by function:

- Outreach / Getting information out
- Policy
- Research
- Survey / Database maintenance
- Conference

Or, by target audience:

- Youth
- General Consumption
- Government
- Business

## VI. Developing Linkages Outside North America

### i. Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD)

Duncan Bury of Environment Canada provided an overview of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD)'s Sustainable Consumption activities. The OECD has been working on sustainable consumption since 1999. The OECD presently has a work programme in place that entails four areas: environmental policies; resource efficiency and public administration; household / public sector consumption; and database on members' policies on sustainable consumption. This work programme will also involve the facilitation of workshops in each of the above-mentioned areas and lead to a synthesis report. Documents that report on the OECD's work on sustainable consumption can be found at: [www.oecd.org](http://www.oecd.org).

### ii. United Nations Environment Programme's Division of Technology, Industry and Economics (UNEP DTIE)

Isabella Marras of United Nations Environment Programme's Division of Technology, Industry and Economics (UNEP DTIE) provided an overview of UNEP's sustainable consumption activities. UNEP defines sustainable consumption as "...means to consume more efficiently and differently and sharing resources between the rich and the poor". It is also important to note that sustainable consumption is not viewed in isolation of sustainable production.

UNEP has organized regional workshops (Africa, Latin America, Eastern Europe and Asia-Pacific) which involved open discussions on sustainable consumption and production issues including: population growth, globalization of communication, trade, role of transnational corporations and intellectual property rights. A report will be released shortly that builds on the outcomes of the workshops entitled: "Global Assessment on SC/SP".

UNEP also publishes a monthly newsletter via e-mail and the Internet called: "SC.net". Participants are invited to contact [sc@unep.fr](mailto:sc@unep.fr) to join the network or to provide inputs to future newsletters. UNEP will also have a database operational in the next couple of months that will summarize green procurement programs from around the world. They are also hosting a green procurement conference in New York for all UN suppliers at the end of June, more details can be found at: [www.aidandtrade.com](http://www.aidandtrade.com). In terms of youth and sustainable consumption, UNEP has recently developed a training kit for youth that talks about sustainable lifestyles, and it can be found at: [www.youthxchange.net](http://www.youthxchange.net). Isabella concluded her overview with highlighting some recently released reports, including: "Tracking progress: Implementing sustainable consumption policies"; and "UN Consumer Guidelines". For more information visit: <http://www.uneptie.org/pc/sustain/home.htm>.



## **VII. Overview of Organizations' Activities**

Each participant spoke for 2 minutes about the sustainable consumption activities of his or her organization. Participants were asked to forward a brief description of their organization's activities to the Canadian Centre for Pollution Prevention for inclusion in the meeting minutes. Appendix E provides written descriptions of each organization's activities.

## **VIII. The NASCA Mission Statement**

Based on the discussions of a common vision and framework, the following mission statement was generated:

*“The North American Sustainable Consumption Alliance is a strategic partnership of people and organizations who are working to promote more sustainable consumption patterns in Mexico, Canada and the United States. We share the common goal of encouraging individuals, businesses, institutions and governments to reduce their impact on the environment and society by changing how they consume materials and resources. The Alliance recognizes that sustainable consumption and sustainable production are inextricably linked. Our mission is to facilitate information exchange, communication and outreach and collaborative action around sustainable consumption. We strive to influence social and economic forces to make the case for sustainable choices more compelling.”*

## **IX. Logistics for Next Meeting**

Participants agreed that a third meeting was necessary to advance the discussions and commitments made in the second meeting. It was agreed that the third meeting will likely take place in Mexico and that logistical support (e.g. meeting space, etc) would be provided by Alliance members from Mexico. Further discussions on logistics were deferred to the NASCA meeting organizers.

## **X. Bike Rack Questions**

Over the course of the meeting, participants had parked two questions on the bike rack for review and discussion at the end of the meeting.

- How can we improve the North American Linkages with UNEP?

Participants from Mexico raised concerns regarding communication of Mexico-based UNEP activity. Some suggestions were provided on how to foster better communications with Mexico-based UNEP staff.

- Who else should be part of the Alliance?

Participants shared their varied opinions on whether and to what extent to engage industry and local government stakeholders. There were discussions on the capacity of industry/local government involvement (voting vs. associate member vs. advisory board member) and how should they be engaged. In terms of who in industry to involve, a suggestion was made to use established green criteria such as environmental labeling certification and make the selection based on environmental certification/recognition. Other participants raised concern as to whether the Alliance was ready to engage industry in a meaningful way. It was agreed that further dialogue on this subject is needed and should be put on as an agenda item for the next meeting, i.e. who to involve and how to go about involving.

## XI. Action Items

Canadian Centre for Pollution Prevention staff agreed to write up and distribute the proceedings of the meeting as part of their responsibilities as meeting hosts. Lowell Center staff agreed to summarize the results of the ‘open space’ meeting. Participants committed to undertaking the following action items after the meeting:

Person Responsible	Task	When (to whom)
-Alejandro Callejas - Riaz Escobedo, - Mario Silva	<u>Setup a website and list serve</u> that would host NASCA information within 1-2 months.	September 2002
- Alejandro Callejas, - Mario Silva, - Monica Firl, - Rodney McDonald - Kevin Gallagher - Alice Born - Corey Diamond - Alicia Culver - Dianne DilionRidgley	<u>Supply a summary.</u> For purposes of information exchange and network building, participants who weren't in attendance at last fall's meeting agreed to supply a summary of their organization's sustainable consumption activities	July 31, 2002 (to Tania Del Matto at: <a href="mailto:Tania@c2p2online.com">Tania@c2p2online.com</a> )
- Riaz Escobedo - Alicia Culver - Rodney McDonald - Chris Wolnik - Jeffrey Barber - Kevin Gallagher - Jack Luskin	<u>Provide a paragraph.</u> For the eight potential projects that were developed during the ‘open space’ meeting, project leaders committed to drafting a paragraph outlining the existing research on the project and key action items/plans associated with the project	July 31, 2002 (to Anne Berlin Blackman at: <a href="mailto:Blackman@turi.org">Blackman@turi.org</a> )
- Jeffrey Barber	<u>Survey proposal-</u> draft a proposal on conducting a	July 31, 2002 (circulate to all)

	survey of the North American sustainable consumption activities with the future intent of hosting the information collected on a NASCA website.	
- Jack Luskin	<u>Showcase project ideas</u> - look into the possibility of meeting with funding agencies to discuss the plate of eight NASCA projects	
- ALL	<u>Review draft proposal.</u> Participants will be forwarded a draft proposal on the survey of North American sustainable consumption activity	