

Sustainable Materials Management: Sustainable Consumption and Production: European Union Policy

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On July 16, 2008, the European Commission announced a series of proposals to improve the environmental performance of products and to increase the demand for more sustainable goods and production technologies. The [Sustainable Consumption and Production and Sustainable Industrial Policy Action Plan](#) identifies voluntary and required actions to influence consumer behavior and improve the energy and environmental performance of products. This fact sheet describing the Action Plan is not comprehensive; rather, it provides a starting point for readers interested in investigating the topic.

European Union (EU) Sustainable Consumption and Production (SCP) and Sustainable Industrial Policy Action Plan

Summary of the Action Plan

The Sustainable Consumption and Production (SCP) and Sustainable Industrial Policy Action Plan addresses EU goals for environmental sustainability, economic growth, and public welfare. By improving the overall environmental performance of products throughout their life-cycle and supporting the development of more sustainable products and production technologies, it seeks both to foster resource conservation and resource efficiency and to “decouple” economic growth from environmental degradation.

Describing several important concepts provides useful context for understanding the Action Plan. “Sustainable development” is defined by the World Commission on Environment and Development in its 1987 report [“Our Common Future”](#) as “development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.” The [Oslo Roundtable on Sustainable Production and Consumption](#) in 1994 proposed a related definition for sustainable consumption: “the use of goods and services that respond to basic needs and bring a better quality of life, while minimizing the use of natural resources, toxic materials and emissions of waste and pollutants over the life cycle, so as not to jeopardize the needs of future generations.” In both cases, a central question is the degree to which improvements in environmental quality can be achieved through the substitution of more efficient and less polluting goods and services (patterns of consumption), rather than through reductions in the volumes of goods and services consumed (levels of consumption). In both cases, also, these concepts raise broader social questions related, e.g., to poverty, human rights, and global trade.

The EU Sustainable Consumption and Production and Sustainable Industrial Policy Action Plan is an important part of the [EU’s Sustainable Development Strategy](#), which affirms the United Nations’ [Marrakech Process on Sustainable Consumption and Production](#) and global 10-Year Sustainable Consumption and Production Framework (see UNEP section, below).

The EU SCP Action Plan includes:

- A proposal to revise and expand the scope of the [2005 EU Eco-Design Directive for Energy-Using Products](#). The current directive establishes minimum technical eco-

design requirements for consumer appliances such as hairdryers, computers, refrigerators, and office equipment. The proposal expands requirements to energy-related products: products that do not consume energy during use, but have an indirect impact on energy consumption. It also defines voluntary benchmarks for environmental performance

- A proposal to extend mandatory labeling requirements related to the energy performance of products, under the [1992 Energy Labelling Directive](#). Under the proposal, this directive, which requires labeling of household appliances to increase consumer awareness about energy and environmental performance, would be applied to a wider range of products
- A proposal to strengthen the voluntary [EU Eco-Label](#) by widening the number of products covered (e.g., including food and beverage products) and streamlining the system. The proposal is designed to encourage manufacturers to go beyond mandatory minimum product standards. The Action Plan also proposes that only products attaining a certain level of energy or environmental performance should be procured by EU Member States and institutions and should be eligible for incentives granted by Member States to consumers for the purchase of eco-friendly products
- A separate [Communication on Green Public Procurement](#). This communication identifies priority sectors of the economy and includes a process to establish common environmental criteria and targets to guide green public procurement by Member States
- A proposed revision of the [EU Eco-Management and Audit Scheme \(EMAS\)](#) to increase the number of companies involved, including companies outside the EU, and reduce the administrative burden and costs for Small and Mediums Sized Enterprises (SMEs). EMAS are a management tool to help firms evaluate, report and improve their environmental performance

Background and Development of the SCP Action Plan

The Action Plan integrates and complements a number of existing EU and Member State actions to foster resource efficiency and the use of eco-friendly products. For example, in addition to the specific policies and programs identified in the preceding section of this fact sheet, the Action Plan builds on the [EU's Integrated Product Policy](#), [Thematic Strategy on the Use of Natural Resources](#), and [Thematic Strategy on Waste Prevention and Recycling](#). Along with the Action Plan, these initiatives provide strategic direction for the EU in achieving sustainability goals.

A large number of stakeholders submitted comments during the consultation process conducted between July and September 2007 to allow for public input on the Commission's proposed approach for promoting sustainable consumption and production and sustainable industrial policy. A stakeholder event also was held in October 2007. The resulting July 2008 Action Plan was amended in several ways. For example, earlier versions would have expanded eco-design requirements for energy-using products to non-energy-using consumer goods, such as footwear and furniture.

Examples of SCP and Sustainability Work by Other Organizations

International

United Nations Environment Program (UNEP)

UNEP undertakes a number of activities, including activities related to cleaner production, waste management and environmental management tools, to further SCP goals. Since 1998, UNEP's [Sustainable Consumption and Production Branch](#) has worked to develop comprehensive national programs or action plans on sustainable consumption and production. The UN is responsible from managing the Marrakech Process and development of the 10-Year Sustainable Consumption and Production Framework through Regional Marrakech Process Consultations. The goal of the Framework is to accelerate the shift towards sustainable

consumption and production (SCP), thus promoting social and economic development within the carrying capacity of ecosystems by de-linking economic growth from environmental degradation.

Organization for Economic Co-Operation and Development (OECD)

OECD's Environmental Directorate has done extensive work on the environmental impacts of household consumption and the design of environmental policy targeted at households. One current OECD project is reviewing evidence on the effects of environmental policy on household behavior, with respect to energy use, waste, transport, and water use. OECD's [Horizontal Program on Sustainable Development](#) has undertaken work to identify measures for sustainable manufacturing production.

Other Countries

United Kingdom (UK) Sustainable Consumption and Production is one of the four priority areas identified in the 2005 UK Sustainable Development Strategy. The UK is implementing a series of actions to support sustainable consumption and production goals in the public and private sectors

Norway's Green in Practice (GRIP) is a public-private foundation founded by the Norwegian Ministry of the Environment in 1996 to promote sustainable consumption and production. Norway's [Ministry of Finance](#) has primary responsibility to implement the country's 2007 Strategy for Sustainable Development

Australia requires that certain electrical products offered for sale contain mandatory energy-efficiency labeling to provide consumers with information that helps reduce energy use and green house gas emissions

Netherlands. Local government in Rotterdam and non-governmental organizations piloted a green loyalty point system called [Nu Spaarpas](#) between 2002 and 2004. Nu Spaarpas is an incentive system for sustainable purchasing behavior by consumers, who can earn green points that are redeemable for sustainable products and services

Some U.S. Sustainability Activities and Additional Resources

The U.S. does not have a formal national policy or strategy for sustainable consumption and production or for sustainable development. The [U.S. Environmental Protection Agency \(EPA\)](#) sponsors [numerous sustainability programs](#) for the built environment, water, ecosystems and agriculture, energy, and materials and toxics. The [Network for Sustainability](#) is a voluntary, collaborative network of Federal agencies in the Western United States focused on fostering and furthering the concept of sustainability within the government. The U.S. Department of State's [Sustainable Development Partnerships](#) web page provides extensive information about the U.S. Government's sustainable development initiatives to help other countries create and implement their own development strategies on a range of social and environmental topics.

Examples of sustainability initiatives at the State and local levels include the [California Green Action Team](#), an interagency group that directs progress toward reaching goals of the State's Green Building Order. The [Massachusetts State Sustainability Program](#) sets targets applicable to state facilities with respect to greenhouse gas emission reductions, energy conservation and efficiency, renewable energy, green buildings, and water conservation. Counties and municipalities across [New York State](#) have initiated community-wide sustainability strategies. The [City of Austin Sustainable Communities Initiative](#) combines goals for economic prosperity, social justice, and ecological health, and the [City of Minneapolis' Sustainability Initiative](#) includes the use of sustainability indicators and publication of an annual GreenPrint Report.