

for Affiliates this month in Center research:

Experimental Environmental Programs in the Printing Industry

The ways in which the government has managed the environmental impacts of small printers have evolved over time. Prior to the 1980s, environmental agencies were lenient in their regulation of smaller firms. But as larger, more regulated firms started to reduce their pollution and better manage their environmental performance, regulators realized that smaller firms, collectively, could have a significant impact on the environment, and could no longer be ignored.

It was assumed that small firms could adopt the new pollution prevention practices if they simply had access to technical information about them. As a result, the 1990s brought about an explosion of new environmental technical assistance programs at the national, state, and local levels. These programs were designed to promote pollution prevention and compliance with environmental regulation through a variety of mechanisms, including site assessments, workshops, videoconferences, technical literature development and dissemination, and focus groups.

However, in a recent Rochester Institute of Technology (RIT) study, "The Evolution of Experimental Environmental Programs in the Printing Industry" (PICRM-2003-03) by Sandra Rothenberg and Monica Becker, many printers reported that they do not consider either state or federal government programs to be useful sources of environmental information. They considered the most influential sources of environmental information, instead, to be other companies, such as suppliers or competitors, trade associations, and customers.

Government Agencies Not Viewed As Useful

Respondents to a survey were asked about specific organizations that provide information about environmental technologies. (These programs include: the Printers Simplified Total Environmental Partnership, or PrintStep; EPA Design for the Environment; the Great Printers Project; NEWMOAs PP Information Dissemination Project, or P2Print; and the Printers National Environmental Assistance Program, or PNEAC.) For all programs other than the Graphic Arts Technical Foundation (GATF), one third to one half of the respondents reported that they were unfamiliar with the organization in question. In other words, a significant percentage of the industry has no knowledge of the environmental programs targeted specifically to them.

In addition, of the firms familiar with the programs, 60 to 84%

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indicated that they were “not at all useful.” Again, GATF was the exception, with only 28% of respondents indicating that GATF’s environmental information is not useful.

A surprising 45% of firms responded that they were not familiar with PNEAC, the Printers’ National Environmental Assistance Center, which is supported by a partnership between GATF, the EPA, university-based technical assistance programs, and PIA (the Printing Industries of America). The respondents who were familiar with PNEAC, however, reported that it provided the most useful information, compared to all the other local, state, and federal environmental information dissemination programs, including GATF’s.

If Not the Government, Then Who?

A study conducted in 1995 for the Illinois Department of Natural Resources had also found that businesses are more likely to see suppliers, competitors, and accountants as sources of credible information regarding new technologies, rather than government assistance programs. Government is still seen by most firms as hostile, though this view is changing in some circles.

Regulators now realize that they are not often viewed as the most credible sources of information, so partnering with other sources, such as trade associations, can be one way to increase their credibility. This is evidenced in the satisfaction of almost all the printers in the RIT study who are familiar with and rely on PNEAC.

Conclusion

Until firms feel that they are not in danger of being found in violation of regulations, they will typically be unwilling to work with government partners on proactive pollution prevention. There are several programs emerging, such as The Massachusetts Environmental Results Program and New Hampshire PrintStep, that are experimenting with alternate forms of regulations (such as self-certification) for small printers.

2003 Research Monographs:

To access this research monograph, "The Evolution of Experimental Environmental Programs in the Printing Industry," and other publications of the Center, go to:

http://print.rit.edu/research/index_byyr.html

Next Month:

We will examine the manufacturing-related problems currently facing the industry and assess current industry approaches to improving operating efficiencies in light of benchmarks established by leading companies. We will also look at how managers view new technology and new management techniques designed to improve productivity.

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