

Audit of Emerging Environmental Issues

The Printing Industries Association of Australia (*Printing Industries*) has been involved in environmental issues for some time. The Association has produced an environment policy and has published several resources such as the Printing Industry Environment Management Manual and the Green Printer to help industry members become good environmental corporate citizens. *Printing Industries* is currently a signatory to two environmental initiatives – the Greenhouse Challenge and the National Packaging Covenant.

Printing Industries decided to be more proactive by helping to foreshadow the emerging environmental issues. A proforma information-gathering template was designed to help capture the emerging environmental issues. The template covered the following areas:

- ◆ Environmental issue
- ◆ Proposing agency
- ◆ Description of issue
- ◆ Likely impact on the printing industry
- ◆ Likelihood of implementation
- ◆ Expected timeframe for implementation and
- ◆ Region(s) to be affected by the proposals.

The issues identified during the audit were both varied in impact, complexity and range, and covered issues such as the discharge of chemical substances to compliance with regulatory measures such as the National Pollutant Inventory and the National Packaging Covenant, to emerging concepts such as extended producer responsibility and all the associated responsibilities that relate to product stewardship.

The audit confirmed that the environmental area is increasingly coming to deal with complex issues and all tiers of government are becoming engaged in some form of regulation. Local, State and Commonwealth governments are all pursuing their environmental objectives with varying degree of vigor.

Initiatives in the Greenhouse Challenge area cannot only help cut back carbon emissions to the atmosphere but can result in annual savings to printing operations through lower energy bills.

Cutting back on the amount of plastic shopping bags used by consumers results in gains to the paper making industries which produce paper bags.

Eliminating excessive waste in the form of paper, inks and chemicals or other consumables results in direct savings to the bottom line of printing operations. These savings are important and would be welcome by many given the current tight margins faced by many print operators.

Investing in non solvent based alternatives such as soy or vegetable based inks would help position printers in a more ideal situation to successfully bid for government related work and satisfy the tender requirements of such contracts which are increasingly insisting on responsible environmental outcomes. Using non-solvent based alternatives may also help printers lower their exposure to potential OHS issues and liability.

Responsible environmental practices makes good commercial sense since they not only help printing companies improve the bottom line by minimising the generation of waste but also allow printing companies to benefit from opportunities made possible through the greening of the value chain.

The range of issues identified by the environmental audit can be grouped into the following four broad categories:

- ◆ Recycling
- ◆ Extended producer responsibility
- ◆ Greening of supply chain and
- ◆ Government initiated programs

Recycling

Seen as an important element of any strategy that aims to reduce overall waste generation. Recycling can cover material used and produced at different phases of the value chain. Ranging from industry inputs or raw materials to finished products such as advertising material and newspaper inserts.

Another area of concern in recent times has been packaging products where the protective packaging of products has resulted in litter problems. The National Packaging Covenant is a policy instrument that is currently being used to help achieve both recycling and optimal resource conservation objectives in the area of packaging.

Extended producer responsibility

Also known as product stewardship sees the producers of products become responsible for the ultimate disposal/recovery of the product in a post consumer environment. Packaging waste has been identified by environmental authorities as a key waste stream that must be reduced otherwise tough regulations could be applied to help reduce the waste flow to landfill. The concept of product stewardship if universally applied does provide a benefit for local products over imports and can be used by responsible authorities as an industry assistance tool.

Greening of supply chain

Pressure is mounting on government and government agencies to give preference in government related contracts and work to suppliers who meet minimum environmental performance standards. Government procurement is thus being used to achieve environmental objectives and has the potential to be used as an industry assistance tool.

Eco-labelling of products and environmental certification are related concepts.

Government initiated programs

To help deliver better environmental outcomes and performance, governments are increasingly encouraging industry participants to become signatories to government initiated programs.

Printing Industries is currently a signatory to the Greenhouse Challenge and the National Packaging Covenant and encourages industry members to follow its' example and become signatories as well. The benefit of high participation of industry participants in voluntary schemes such as the National Packaging Covenant is that resulting outcomes if deemed beneficial and acceptable by environmental authorities and regulators help to prevent the introduction of mandatory schemes which often can be divorced from commercial reality.

Doing nothing is not a viable option

Given the increasing importance of environmental issues, doing nothing is not a practical option for our industry. As since good environmental performance often is also associated with improvements to the bottom line and greater returns on invested funds or assets, responsible environmental outcomes can often represent a win-win situation for industry participants.

The other inherent advantage of being proactive in the environmental area is that voluntary schemes and programs that culminate in environmental gains and benefits are almost always preferable to mandatory schemes imposed by governments which can be excessively bureaucratic resulting in high compliance costs that often negate any benefits flowing from the desired initiative.

Printing Industries and other industry or sectoral-based representative bodies cannot afford to be operating in a reactive mode. Industry participants themselves have a vested interest to become proactive on issues dealing with the environment.

Doing nothing poses the greatest danger for the future commercial viability of the industry. Suppose environmental authorities encourage greater use of the electronic media and reduce the amount of printed matter with the belief that such an approach would help reduce waste and paper related litter. Suppose newspaper inserts are banned resulting in fewer or no inserts and the introduction of an alternative way of distribution.

There is also the danger that developers of alternative technologies to paper based print communications such as those based on electronic media outputs, may successfully lobby governments to receive subsidies or grants to help develop their products which would replace paper based communications and deliver utopian style environmental outcomes. Or governments may be tempted to place levies on products such as packaging that they deem to be resulting in excessive waste

Proposed Strategies

Having identified emerging environmental issues the next phase involves the drafting of appropriate strategies to help manage the environmental issues in a more proactive manner. *Printing Industries* believes the following outline of proposed strategies will prove to be instrumental in helping to promote and manage the identified issues.

Publicity and educational related activities

If there are examples of good industry environmental practices or outcomes then industry stakeholders need to publicise it at every appropriate opportunity.

For example the Australian newspaper industry leads the world in terms of newspaper recycling rates.

The industry representative bodies need to continue to constantly produce and publish environmental based publications that are industry specific in nature and which are updated on a regular basis to ensure both currency and relevancy for users.

Lobbying activities

It is rare for an environmental issue to impact only on one sector or a segment of the industry value chain. Often environmental measures tend to have a broad industry impact, it is therefore imperative that the industry speaks with a unified voice on environmental issues and concerns.

The various industry representative bodies need to coordinate their lobbying activities as a unified lobbying campaign is likely to result in superior outcomes compared to uncoordinated and fragmented lobbying efforts.

Analysis

It is also important that proper processes are set up to analyse emerging environmental issues. Assessing the potential impact of a proposed environmental regulation, measure or issue on the industry and helping prepare supportive material is a necessary function of any subsequent industry lobbying efforts.

Establishment of an environment secretariat

The environmental issues facing the printing and associated industries are both diverse and complex and often require the attention of expert personnel. The issues need to be constantly monitored and evaluated regarding their potential impact with the findings subsequently disseminated to various industry stakeholders.

It would be appropriate to establish an environment secretariat position to undertake the tasks outlined above and to publish a regular industry newsletter covering emerging environmental issues both domestically and internationally.

Establishment of a printing industry environment forum (PIEF)

PIEF would comprise of key industry stakeholders that would meet on a regular basis perhaps quarterly to discuss impeding environmental issues relevant to the industry. The PIEF could be administered by the proposed printing industry environment secretariat.

Environment awards

Another industry initiative could involve the establishment of annual environment awards to reward and recognise the environmental performances of industry participants. The awards could be organised by the proposed PIEF and could have different categories based on company size.

The environment awards could be part of the broader and revamped national print awards.