



Enviroscope

Robert S. Benson, Senior Program Manager
Office of Policy, Planning, and Evaluation
U.S. Environmental Protection Agency
Washington, DC

Update on the Common Sense Initiative

The metal finishing industry is playing a leadership role in the Common Sense Initiative (CSI), EPA's centerpiece program for innovative approaches to environmental protection. During the past year, the Metal Finishing Sector has led the way in CSI, with an active industry involvement, constructive policy dialogue with other stakeholder groups, and the development of a range of projects that address important goals for the industry.

AESF members who attended last year's Pollution Prevention and Control Conference in Orlando, FL, heard EPA Administrator Carol Browner discuss her commitment to pursue "cleaner, cheaper and smarter" solutions to environmental problems through the CSI. Administrator Browner described CSI's industry-by-industry approach to policy-making and discussed cross-media environmental issues in relation to other factors, such as economics, technology and product quality. She stressed the underlying principal of CSI is that the agency can best protect human health and the environment by setting tough environmental goals, while encouraging flexibility and innovation in how goals are met.

A Different Approach

In the January 1995 issue of *Plating and Surface Finishing*, Peter Gallerani, CEF, and I wrote in this column about CSI's unique approach to policy-making. Metal finishing is one of six industries taking part in the first round of the program. Many different public and private sector constituent groups are participants and partners in CSI, with EPA's headquarters and regional offices playing an active role. Each industry-specific team is exploring the dynamics of its industry and ways in which it interacts with EPA and individual

states, looking for improvement opportunities in six key issue areas—regulations, permitting, compliance, reporting, pollution prevention, and environmental technology. Innovative, non-adversarial thinking is encouraged, with decisions to be made by consensus among participant stakeholder groups.

Much has happened in the CSI Metal Finishing Sector since the CSI was started. There have been five meetings of the sector's steering group. (B.J. Mason is AESF's representative.) There have been numerous workgroup meetings, conference calls, and project team discussions, with other AESF members taking part. There have been facility site visits for stakeholders and public "town meetings" for this sector in New England, Michigan and Los Angeles. These activities have involved many representatives from the industry, as well as participants from EPA, environmental groups, POTWs, states, and other organizations, drawn from a growing network of more than 150 interested individuals.

In early 1995, the Metal Finishing Sector established five workgroups. Each has developed specific projects to promote "cleaner, cheaper, smarter" performance goals for this industry. The sector expanded upon EPA and private sector programs that pre-date CSI, including extensive R&D for the metal finishing industry. The workgroups and projects are based, in part, on a performance "tier" structure for the industry. This structure has served as a framework for understanding the industry and a tool for targeting policy options to meet the unique needs and opportunities presented by each tier:

- **Tier 1** firms are consistently in compliance with regulations and are proactive in making environmental

improvements to move beyond compliance.

- **Tier 2** represents the largest industry segment—firms that routinely seek compliance with regulatory requirements. Most firms in this tier are consistently in compliance, but lack the motivation and/or resources to improve beyond that level. A subset of these firms are not in regular compliance, but would like to improve.
- **Tier 3** firms are old and outdated shops that are not sufficiently profitable to invest in new pollution controls and may want to simply shut down, but cannot do so because of fear of clean-up liability.
- **Tier 4** firms are "renegade" shops that are out of compliance, make no attempt to improve, and escape enforcement attention. These firms compete with the higher-tier firms by avoiding the costs of environmental investments.

Each of the projects now being developed by the Metal Finishing Sector is intended to move firms up or out of the tier structure, and thereby meet CSI's objectives on either a facility-specific or industry-wide basis. Projects designed for middle- and top-tier firms are intended to provide greater incentives to seek continuous performance improvement, develop new technologies that will prevent pollution, and tailor compliance assistance programs to meet the needs of the industry. Projects for lower-tier firms are seeking more effective ways to deal with old, contaminated facilities and chronic non-compliers.

Measuring Progress

How is progress being measured? In the Metal Finishing Sector, after a year of CSI activity, progress is measured in terms of real-world

projects getting underway, with tangible environmental and economic benefits for the industry. Here are a few examples:

- **Metal Finishing National Resource Center.** This trailblazing compliance assistance initiative will provide on-line compliance and technical assistance information for metal finishers. The project is funded and currently in a design and pilot phase. It is scheduled to open this spring.
- **Chromium Emission Pollution Prevention Technology Demonstration.** Our research workgroup is benefitting from AESF leadership in testing low-cost technologies to meet chromium MACT standards. The workgroup also is developing a broader strategic plan for research.
- **Metal Finishing Guidance Manual.** As I write this article, contract work is underway on a comprehensive compliance and environmental management tool for the industry, written for easy use on the shop floor. The manual is being

co-funded by EPA and the metal finishing trade associations.

- **The Reporting Information Inventory Team Evaluation (RIITE) Project.** Pilot projects are underway in Arizona and Texas. The goal is nothing less than a re-engineering of federal, state, and local reporting requirements, to reduce regulatory burden and improve public data bases.
- **EPA New England CLEAN Project.** EPA's New England Regional office is working with up to 18 metal finishers in Maine and New Hampshire to conduct pollution prevention audits and provide enforcement amnesty for minor violations, a prototype for a national audit/amnesty program.
- **Metal Products and Machinery Effluent Guideline Recommendation.** The regulatory workgroup has recommended that iron and aluminum be removed from the proposed rule's pretreatment list, and this recommendation is receiving serious consideration from EPA's Office of Water.

Each project addresses one or more key environmental issues facing the metal finishing industry, and offers the prospect of "cleaner, cheaper and smarter" outcomes that can be applied on a nationwide basis.

Other promising projects also are under development, including:

- A RCRA F006 Sludge Project involving AESF's Milwaukee Branch.
- The Metal Finishing 2000 "flexible track" projects that will explore ways to promote continuous environmental improvement by getting firms out of the regulatory system altogether.
- A Tier 3 Site Transition Project to help outdated shops transfer their property in a responsible manner.
- An Access to Capital project that is hunting for innovative ways to finance environmental improvements and clean-up.
- Tools and incentives for POTWs to work more effectively with industrial dischargers.

Our short-term success will be measured by our ability—working together with industry and others—to make these projects a reality, and keep them focused on industry's greatest needs.

In the long run, the progress of the CSI Metal Finishing Sector will be measured by the changes we can achieve in policies and regulations, in compliance and enforcement programs, in corporate culture and practices, in public perceptions of metal finishers, and, ultimately, in the improved environmental and economic performance of the metal finishing industry. Our ambitious set of projects will lay the groundwork for these long-term changes. With the continuing help of AESF and its members, we can achieve "cleaner, cheaper, smarter" outcomes that will make CSI a success. *P&SF*

About the Author

Robert S. Benson is senior program manager of the Pollution Prevention and Toxics Branch, Office of Policy, Planning and Evaluation, U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, Washington, DC—Phone: 202/260-8668; FAX: 202/260-8662. He is EPA's staff lead for the CSI Metal Finishing Sector.