

Product Stewardship and You

RECALLING ALL CARS

*'The European Union has reached a final deal on a law that will force automakers to pay for the recycling of old cars. Starting with vehicles sold after January 1, 2001, automakers will have to pay most of the cost of taking back and recycling cars at the end of their lives. And beginning in 2007, car manufacturers will have to take back all old cars, regardless of when they were built. By 2006, at least 80 percent of the weight of discarded cars must be reused or recycled, and by 2015 the percentage will rise to 85. The new law also bans the use of some hazardous heavy metals in cars starting in 2003. **The European Commission is drafting similar legislation that would force manufacturers to pay for the recycling and disposal of electrical and electronic goods.**'*

That's something to think about isn't it? These laws already exist in Sweden and Norway and within the next few years anybody manufacturing or supplying many types of goods in Europe will have to take financial responsibility for their ultimate recycling and disposal. Responsibility doesn't end when the product is sold or shipped – it remains throughout the life of the product.

This is the ultimate conclusion of the path ESTA is promoting with its Product Stewardship Program.

Product Stewardship programs are well established in other industry sectors – particularly the chemical industries. Product Stewardship is the safe use and handling of products at all stages of their lifecycles. Health, safety and environmental protection must be an integral part of designing, manufacturing, marketing, distributing, using, recycling and disposing of products. However it's not just doing these things – it's documenting and demonstrating them so that the responsibility and understanding of health, safety and environmental concerns passes all the way along the chain – from manufacturer to end user.

As far as ESTA is concerned the need for a Product Stewardship Program grew out of the Technical Standards Program and the Fog and Smoke Working Group. Showing full responsibility for the manufacture and use of fog fluids is clearly key to establishing safe standards and guidelines for their use. However the extension from fog fluid to everything we do is clear – all of us share a responsibility for the safe use of products whatever link of the chain we are and ESTA intends to promote and support this responsibility.

Accordingly a Task Group has been working towards establishing guidelines and suggestions for member companies to use in setting up their own, internal, Product Stewardship programs. ESTA will not certify or police these programs – it's up to each company to decide how this program should work inside their own organization. The program can be large or small – as formal or informal as you like, what's important is that the basic principles are followed. When you can confidently answer a few questions about your company and the products it handles then you are well on the way, here's a few examples of questions you might ask yourself:-

- Am I familiar with any and all safety related issues with the products I supply?
- Can I provide up to date MSDS sheets or other safety related information and do I know where to obtain updates to this information?
- Do my suppliers know that I need and use this information and that they should send me any updates in a timely manner?
- Do I make this information readily available to my customers? How?

Every day we each see many examples of Product Stewardship. There are so many that we often take them for granted, things such as: ingredient labels on food and other packaging; warning labels on alcoholic beverages and other products; tamper-resistant packaging. The common element in each is product responsibility or stewardship by the product's manufacturer.

Very soon you will be receiving detailed information from ESTA on how you can participate – we're strongly encouraging you to read that brochure and join the program. Membership in this program is completely voluntary - it's up to you to embrace the components of the program that are relevant to you.

I'm sure most of you already offer most of the services mentioned, such as providing MSDS sheets and advice on storage and use of your equipment. The point of Product Stewardship however is to be proactive in the dissemination of this information. Make sure your staff and customers know this information is available and how to get it. Publicize it in your literature, on your Web site, and in your press releases. Also look at the other side of the equation and make sure you know how to get the same information from your supplier and make sure the information you have is current.

Product Stewardship is simple: It's openly passing information up and down the chain of supply to make sure everyone knows how to use products properly.

It's clear Product Stewardship will increase our understanding and our customers' understanding of product hazards, uses, and disposal requirements. However, Product Stewardship also has business value. It can be a factor in enhancing customer relationships so that customers will incorporate a supplier's ability to provide Product Stewardship information in their purchasing decisions. Product Stewardship also will help you to manage liability and will enhance the public image of your company and ESTA.

ESTA cannot run your Product Stewardship Program for you, but we can provide information to get you started. We are providing information on implementation, checklists and a suggested company statement. In addition sample press releases and a PowerPoint presentation on Product Stewardship will be made available on the ESTA www site. The next step is yours.

Mike Wood, August 2000