

A Natural Selection System to Drive Life Cycle-Based Eco-Efficiency and Sustainable Development

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Recent research on the effectiveness of eco-labeling raises concerns that despite past successes in specific product groups (notably paper and laundry detergent), companies see decreasing promise for market benefits in other product areas. At the same time, international consumer surveys indicate high and increasing support for companies with a strong reputation on the broader issues of corporate responsibility and sustainable development. The World Summit on Sustainable Development in Johannesburg re-affirmed the imperative for linking the “two sides” of the sustainable consumption agenda: reducing pollution and wasteful consumption in rich countries while promoting life-sustaining consumption and sustainable development in developing nations. And user need input expressed to the UN Environment Program’s Life Cycle Initiative continues to stress the need for building the capacity for – and relevance of – LCA in developing countries.

This presentation will describe a newly-launched system for making – and then exercising accountability for -- voluntary arrangements that generate private and societal benefits (what economists call “positive externalities”). The “New Earth” Initiative enables such arrangements to be created voluntarily and spontaneously by and among individuals, communities, for-profit companies, governments, and non-governmental organizations (NGOs). The system provides a label to the products of companies that make five commitments, which include contributions to a fund for sustainable development, and engagement of stakeholders to characterize, continually improve, and transparently report the environmental, economic, and social impacts of the company.

The presentation will describe the operation and target benefits of the system, and the expected impacts on the development and usage of LCA, ecolabeling, and corporate sustainability reporting.