

GC3 Retail Portal Project Call March 29, 2011

Present: Mark Buczek, Independent Consultant; Holly Cline, Target; Jenny Gitlitz, Independent Consultant; Matthew Thurston, REI; Yve Torrie, Lowell Center for Sustainable Production; & Jody Villecco, Wholefoods.

Background:

As some retailers were new to this working group, Yve gave a summary of the group and its purpose: to engage retailers in a dialog about managing the chemical ingredients in the products they sell. This aspect of sustainability seems to be lacking in many of the sustainability initiatives we have seen to date. Also retailers command large purchasing and market power and therefore have the opportunity to effect enormous change throughout the supply chain. Last year we focused on developing a report: *Best Practices in Product Chemicals Management in the Retail Industry*, and offered some guidelines for retailers wanting to develop these systems. One of these guidelines was determining which product chemicals management approach may be the best fit for a retail operation. At the 2010 GC3 Roundtable the working group decided to develop an online resource for retailers looking for tools and systems they could use to manage the chemical ingredients in the products they are selling. We have called this project the retail portal project.

Status of the Retail Portal:

The data gathering stage of the project is almost complete. The data has been sorted by product sector and type of tool: standards, certifications & labels; 3rd party evaluation tools; RSLs; and consumer guides. There is also a set of 3rd party tools that, according to the developers, are relevant to all product sectors. For each tool a set of data, determined by the working group, has been gathered. Tool developers in most cases have been contacted to confirm accuracy. This isn't an exhaustive list of tools and there will be an opportunity for comment and correction when the project is online. Also on the website will be a link to a more in depth description of the project, the methods for determining the criteria and selections, and the findings. The portal will be up and running in time for the retail conference.

Comments on the Retail Portal:

- Another tool category, industry scorecards, could be included e.g. the Sustainable Packaging Coalition, and OIA Eco Index fit more appropriately into this category.
- For food and beverage the tools are limited to agriculture type tools, not for example seafood and meat production. This section could be expanded.

Outreach for Retail Portal:

We would like to do some extensive outreach to make sure the retail portal is reaching retailers interested in this topic. Some suggested places to conduct this outreach include:

- RILA's RSI group, especially the product stewardship working group. Regular webinars are held and this could be a good webinar topic.
- OIA's Eco Index Chemicals and Toxics working group would be interested as this group focuses on chemical responsibility.

- New Hope (coordinates trade shows and publications) & Natural Product Association.
- Sustainability Consortium.
- Consumer Products Specialty Association.

Next steps:

I've made some suggestions for next steps for the working group and it was suggested that these be sent to the wider group for comment. They will be sent out with the notes. The suggestions are:

- Continue to maintain the DB, conduct extensive outreach to retailers and retail organizations, get more retailers engaged in this dialog and at that point, decide next steps for this work. This may potentially mean putting the working group on hold for a year while outreach is being conducted, and then reforming the following year.
- Combine efforts with another organization(s) e.g. as a resource on OIA's eco index, as a resource for some of RILA's work.
- Expand the project to include chemical management tools for other stages of the supply chain e.g. product consumer manufacturers, material manufacturers etc.
- Expand it to include other aspects of sustainability e.g. energy, waste, human health etc.

Initial comments included:

- A niche has been built for our work and it's important to grow it (outreach, promotion) before expanding it to ensure success. It serves a specific purpose and is very helpful as it is.
- Once there is a critical mass behind this work, then it could be expanded to other parts of the supply chain or other sustainability indicators.
- The Global Reporting Initiative (GRI), and UL standards are starting to engage the issue of chemical toxicity but it's a process.