

Procter & Gamble To Avoid Landfills

BY HENRIK JONES

Procter & Gamble's Director of Environmental Coordination, Dr. Deborah Anderson, spoke last week about solid waste and environmental marketing. She said "P&G wants to do right and do it profitably." With this goal in mind, P&G is marketing products that are environmentally safe and is sourcing recycled materials.

Anderson shared many examples of P&G's environmental programs, including a new plastic pump aerosol that replaces compressed air spray cans (which historically contained CFCs.) P&G, however, has faced two problems in marketing environmentally sound products: economics and education.

Although surveys suggest people will pay more for environmentally sensitive products, actual product sales tests show that only a minority will pay the premium. Anderson explained that a psychographic study segmenting consumers indicated that only 10-15% of those calling themselves "environmentalists" would pay a premium. This group was referred to as "True Blue Greens."

A second problem P&G faces in marketing environmentally sensitive products is that consumers can be confused about the actual environmental impact of products. Consumers are inundated with "environmentally safe products," but some are just marketing hoaxes, like biodegradable plastic bags that don't really degrade and may be more harmful than traditional plastic bags. Anderson expressed concern that the present proliferation of environmental labels leaves the consumer uninformed or misinformed. She suggested the need for federal guidelines on packaging versus a patchwork quilt of municipal ordinances (i.e. Minneapolis' ban on non-recyclable packaging). P&G has been working to provide a nationally accepted framework for consumers to assess "green" products.

On the procurement front, P&G is trying actively to create a market for recycled products. One of the pitfalls of recycling programs is that there is no buyer for recycled products. Good news for producers of recycled plastics, however: here comes P&G. Anderson said there is a shortage of recycled plastic to package P&G's products. (This is a start-up opportunity for you environmental entrepreneurs.)

P&G now sells SPIC & SPAN in recycled plastic bottles. P&G's hope is that recycled SPIC & SPAN bottles will be recycled again, and again, and again. That is one way P&G's products can avoid going to landfills where they occupy space forever. Other alternatives to landfill include composting cardboard packaging or selling detergent concentrate in smaller packages.

In summary, Dr. Anderson convinced me that P&G has taken far-reaching steps to help save our planet. And, for good reason. As Anderson said, environmentalism is a high concern for consumers.

There will be an organizational meeting of the Environmental Club on Wednesday, September 26 at 3pm in Aldrich 111.