

The Future of Ecodesign



Manufacturers - use the opportunities!

In one matter the experts are all agreed: manufacturers, in whatever sector, should make good use of the opportunities opening up to them and become actively involved now in designing the preliminary studies relating to the Directive, as the results of those studies will ultimately form the basis for the *implementing measures*. After all, ignorance is no excuse in law!

The pleasing aspect for all concerned is that the EuP Directive has largely been accepted among European companies. Whereas the material prohibitions embodied in the

WEEE and RoHS regulations aroused great interest among engineers and technicians, it is now the turn of the decision-making levels to have their say, according to attorney Martin Ahlhaus of Nörr Stiefenhofer Lutz: "Questions relating to the EuP Directive are coming more from areas of the business dealing with strategic matters, particularly from senior and middle management." Consequently, it is proving much easier to implement the requirements of the EuP Directive than had been the case with the material prohibitions.

The key to implementation of the EuP Directive is procurement of the appropriate information. That is no trivial matter however. The first points of contact are usually the competent authorities and professional bodies, though other resources which might be utilised include the services of management consultants or attendance at relevant workshops.

Dr. Oehme, from Germany's Environment Agency, explains how information is disseminated by the authorities in Germany: "It is the role of the Federal Institute of Materials Re-





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Dr. Norbert Reintjes, employee of Ökopol

which they are being subjected also entails a significant expansion of their rights.” It is much easier today to influence legislative procedures at European level than it was 10 or 15 years ago at national level, he believes. And in summary he states: “All too often – and very much to our regret – manufacturers are failing to use this opportunity.” He also believes that small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) are trailing significantly behind in this respect, and consequently he hopes that trade associations in particular, whose membership is very often made up of SMEs, will more strongly encourage their members so that they are not only provided with a continuous flow of information but also are in a position to implement the process of change as smoothly as possible.

So what problems are faced by manufacturers in their attempts to create a “Green Product”? The EU Directive does indeed seek to minimise the environmental impact of products. Based on that premise, Dr. Oehme believes that it is “without doubt an effective instrument which will help to enhance energy and material efficiency and to reduce hazardous substances.” However: “The EuP Directive lays down minimum standards – nothing more and nothing less,” Dr. Reintjes from Ökopol emphasises. Consequently, only closely-defined demands can be placed upon it. On the other hand, the EU Directive does represent a lifecycle-based approach to the ecologically sound design of energy-

using products. That means achieving savings on energy and other resources in the manufacture, use and disposal of the products concerned. Because all that is currently too complex, proposals for implementation of the Framework Directive are currently limited to optimising energy consumption in various operating states of products, either in full operation, normal operation or standby mode, according to Dr Nissen: “Energy is most easily regulated on the basis of standards, and most studies to date have shown that the usage phase is when the greatest influence can be exerted.”

It is not without a degree of pride that Dr. Wimmer, Professor of Environmentally Compatible Product Design at the Technical University of Vienna and Chief Executive of the Ecodesign Company, shows the eco-friendly result of a project conducted in conjunction with Philips Speech Processing – the latest “Digital Pocket Memo” voice recorder from the 96 series. “We analysed the predecessor

model in detail in order to implement ecodesign principles in all aspects of the new model,” he reports, and goes on: “The product eco-statement not only sets out the complete eco-performance, it also certifies that the new model causes 80% less CO₂.” In summary he states: “People just have to think about how to design ecologically intelligent products.” In other words: The EuP Directive can be taken as an opportunity to beat the benchmark and so become more competitive, even quite possibly “by a factor of 50 – if companies have the will to do so.”

Good opportunities for SMEs

Anyone who thinks that only global – or at least pan-European – companies are holding the trump cards when it comes to commercial success is making a big mistake. The invited experts all agree that SMEs have perfectly good opportunities to maintain their success on the market despite – or indeed because of – the EuP Directive. Professor Dr. Wimmer says: “They will find it easier because they can more easily make decisions and can be more flexible in their thinking and action.” That view is also confirmed by Dr Nissen when he states that “98% of the requirements laid down in the EuP procedures are implementable by SMEs – provided, of course, that the legislative procedures are properly applied and there is broad participation in them.” It is, however, essential that companies should deal with the relevant material in good time and not wait until



“As long as a tried and tested solution is working properly, it is difficult to motivate anyone to develop new circuits based on the vague prospect of upcoming EU limits.“

Markus Krämer, Business Development Manager of EBV Elektronik