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CFECA bolstering its ratings program

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The Environmentally Preferred Rating program, launched by the California Film Extruders and Converters Association, wants to gain recognition from nonprofit, issue-oriented environmental advocacy groups, legislators and regulators.

The program is designed to help film and bag makers — and other processors — lessen their impact in hot-button areas such as air and water pollution and landfill content.

“Having industry take a proactive role in setting strict environmental standards and committing to a policy of self-policing in order to ensure the plastics industry remains a good steward of the environment is a monumental first step,” said Kevin Kelly, CFECA president and chief executive officer of Emerald Packaging Inc. in Union City, Calif.

In seeking external support, Robert Bateman, president of Roplast Industries Inc. in Oroville, Calif., has begun explaining the EPR process to the members and staff of a California commission regulating land and water uses and, separately, a board reporting to the California Environmental Protection Agency.

EPR also seeks to catalyze the industry.

“Many uninformed consumers and industry adversaries have the impression that we produce products that do more harm than good in society,” said Pete Grande, head of Command Packaging in Vernon, Calif. “Nothing could be further from the truth.”

He cited American Plastics Council data indicating that plastic bag manufacturing requires fewer chemicals and generates less pollution than paper bag making and noted that municipalities can use plastic waste as a source of energy.

Among nonplastic certification programs are those at the U.S. Green Building Council and Green Seal Inc., both based in Washington, Greenguard Environmental Institute of Atlanta and Scientific Certification Systems of Emeryville, Calif. In many cases, groups use the Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design rating system as a voluntary national standard for develop-

ing sustainable buildings.

“Clearly, the USGBC recognizes the potential for income from its LEED rating system,” said Rob Krebs, director of public affairs with APC in Arlington, Va. “Their budgets and incomes have accrued geometrically in the last three years. Green labeling systems are a way to earn money.”

CFECA did not look at any other certification programs in setting up the EPR process, Grande said.

Beyond certification, other trade groups are developing programs designed to position the plastics industry positively.

The Web site of Operation Clean Sweep, for example, lists 87 processors and resin distributors, manufacturers and transporters, but in a new tactic, the rejuvenated joint program of APC and the Washington-based Society of the Plastics Industry Inc. solicits consumer product makers. Operation Clean Sweep encourages firms to avoid spills, clean up as necessary and practice proper disposal.

Getting a company to participate in the program is difficult in today's business environment, said Pete Dinger, APC senior technology director. Processors may acknowledge the program's value, but “not step up and take the pledge,” even though Operation Clean Sweep “saves money, reduces accidents, lowers insurance [costs] and engenders pride in the workplace,” Dinger said.

The effort also is targeting another audience. “Consumer product manufacturers need to know their supplier is in compliance,” Dinger said.

Meanwhile, before year's end, APC hopes to give national exposure to a Web site serving as a resource on plastic bag and film recovery, said Judith Dunbar, APC director of environmental and technical issues. APC has a California-oriented pilot Web site for the same purpose.

APC is a division of the American Chemistry Council, which, as a membership requirement, audits and certifies chemical companies for responsible-care performance.

CFECA has stepped lively in getting EPR started.

In 2004 for independent EPR auditing, CFECA contracted with Joseph Greene,

president of Greene Plastics Solutions Inc. in Chico, Calif. He has audited four plants and is scheduled to audit the Garland, Texas, plant of Lone Star Plastics Inc.

Before Greene makes his half-day visits, he supplies processors with a list of regulatory, community involvement, recycling and procedural items that he will check. Greene looks for an absence of heavy metals, proper ink disposal, correct liquid containment, training signage, airborne and liquid emissions, pellet containment and post-consumer material usage.

“If I am aware of an industry standard, I will pass it [on] to help them become more compliant,” said Greene, who is also a professor of manufacturing technology and mechanical engineering and director of polymer manufacturing at California State University at Chico.

The program will hire more auditors to handle Midwest and East Coast companies as the need arises. Auditors need to be unrelated to industry members and have a strong knowledge of the manufacturing process, Grande said.

CFECA charges \$5,000 to audit a single plant and \$2,500 for each of an audited company's additional locations.

Among California facilities, Command Packaging, Roplast Industries, the Rancho Cucamonga plant of Heritage Bag Co. and Crown Poly Inc. of Huntington Park received EPR accreditation.

Grande said applications are pending from seven firms in California, Texas, Wisconsin and Louisiana. Among the applicants are Emerald and Lone Star, Wisconsin Film & Bag Inc. of Shawano, Wis., and Schuster Flexible Packaging Inc. of City of Commerce, Calif.

The EPR program focuses on film and bag makers, but is applicable to any plastics process in any geographic location.

In September, Command Packaging at its Vernon plant began converting a high density PE line to extrude bags from post-consumer content, and the firm intends by year's end to convert a low density PE line to use post-consumer content.

In turn, Grande noted, the recycler supplying material to Command is expected to seek EPR accreditation.