Browner Names Six Industries in Plan to Improve Environmental Protection

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U.S. Environmental Protection Agency Administrator Carol M. Browner today announced the selection of the first six major U.S. industries to participate in a new effort to transform the current process of environmental regulation into a comprehensive system for strengthened environmental protection. The new program, called the Common Sense Initiative, is designed to achieve greater environmental protection at less cost by creating pollution control and prevention strategies on an industry-by-industry basis, rather than by the current pollutant-by-pollutant approach. The initiative will analyze the overall environmental impact of each industry.

Speaking today before the Center for National Policy in Washington, D.C., Browner said, "Now is the time to prepare ourselves for the environmental challenges of the next century. We must preserve and strengthen the principles of environmental protection--but to do so, we must change the process.

"The successes that are available if we continue down the path of traditional regulation are incremental at best," Browner said. "The current regulatory system is about going from A to B and B to C. The changes we undertake today are about going from A to Z. I don't think anyone in this country, whether environmental leader or corporate CEO, believes incremental steps will achieve the kind of future we all want."

Browner said that through the Common Sense Initiative, "Government officials at all levels, environmentalists and industry leaders will come together to create industry-by-industry strategies that will work cleaner, cheaper, and smarter to protect public health and our natural resources."

The Common Sense Initiative is expected to result in significant improvements to current regulations, as well as proposals for Congress to consider in cases where legislative reforms may be required. Consensus proposals generated by the Initiative will be designed to better protect the environment, reduce pollution overall in the U.S., and reduce by billions of dollars the costs that industries face.

The six industries selected by Browner to participate in the "pilot" phase of the Initiative are: auto manufacturing, computers and electronics, iron and steel, metal finishing and plating, petroleum refining, and printing.

For each of the selected industries, Browner announced that a team will be formed, headed by top EPA officials and including environmental vice presidents from the industries, as well as representatives from national and grass roots environmental groups, state environmental commissioners, local government officials, labor union representatives, environmental justice groups and, in some cases, officials from other Federal agencies, such as the Department of
Energy. The teams will examine every aspect of environmental regulation as it affects an industry and the environment and identify opportunities for greater reductions in pollution through flexible, innovative environmental protection strategies.

"When our country began to pass environmental laws starting in the early '70s, we did it issue by issue, crisis by crisis," Browner said. "Too often, instead of preventing pollution, we simply shuffled and shifted pollution from one place to another.

"The Clinton Administration believes that the process of change begins now. It will take a new generation of environmental protection to meet the challenges of the next 25 years. The Common Sense Initiative is the start of a fundamentally new way of protecting our environment," Browner added.

Noting that "All too often, we've seen too little environmental protection at too high a price," Browner said the Initiative's goal is to result in a cleaner environment at less cost to industry. As a group, the industries involved in the initiative spent more than $8.2 billion in 1992 on compliance with environmental laws, according to the U.S. Department of Commerce. Their combined release of toxic pollutants into the environment came to 395 million pounds that year, 12.4 percent of all reported emissions nationally.

Browner said the six industries were selected as the first participants in the new Clinton Administration Initiative because they are among the nation's largest, employing almost 4 million Americans and representing almost 14 percent of the Gross Domestic Product. She focused particular attention on the small business-dominated industries in the program, noting that small businesses, the nation's top job creators, have the most to gain through the new Common Sense approach. In addition, the six industries selected have a significant impact on the environment, face a broad array of regulatory challenges, and represent a cross-section of American business, including high-technology and traditional manufacturing industries.

Browner said, "Today, we begin by sitting down with all the parties and putting all the important issues on the table. Today, we move forward with a blueprint for the future."

Some of these ideas--those EPA can undertake within its statutes--will be implemented in the first year. Ideas requiring legislative changes will be pursued in consultation with Congress, Browner said.