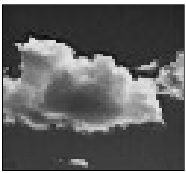




MEI News

Fall 2002

Inside the Minnesota Environmental Initiative



MEI Launches Voluntary Ozone-Reduction Effort

Minnesotans are famous for having a good self image. We like to think that all our women are strong, all our men are good-looking, and our air quality is above average.

Although I wouldn't even attempt to question the first two premises, the state of our air quality actually presents an interesting point of discussion. The air quality in the Twin Cities has been better over the past few decades than that of most other similarly sized metropolitan regions. This relatively clean air has been an important part of what makes Minnesota a great place to live and to do business. But our air quality is now deteriorating during the summer due to increasing problems with ground-level ozone, as well as fine particulate matter. Excess ground-level ozone leads to the formation of smog. It also inflames asthma and makes it unhealthy to exercise outdoors; the impact on children is especially acute.

Rising ozone levels may have dramatic implications for Minnesota's quality of life and economy and, ultimately, excessive ground-level ozone could trigger the enactment of costly federal regulatory programs. (A study conducted for the Minnesota Chamber of Commerce has estimated that regulatory controls could cost \$189 million to \$266 million annually, in 1998

dollars, excluding the costs to state and local government.) During the past few summers, the Twin Cities has had increasing problems in meeting federal ozone standards – exceeding the new eight-hour standard three times in 2001 and once so far in 2002. In part this can be attributed to a tightening of standards, but we are facing the potential for real deterioration of air quality as our population continues to increase and vehicle miles traveled skyrockets at an even greater rate. The Metropolitan Council now projects the arrival of an additional 900,000 individuals by 2030, and that translates into more cars on the road for longer periods of time, and ultimately more ozone.

MEI's newest program, Clean Air Minnesota, is a partnership among business, government and environmental and public health community to tackle the threat. The fundamental goal of the program is promote voluntary approaches to reduce emissions of volatile organic compounds and nitrogen oxide, the critical precursors for the formation of ground-level ozone. If the program is successful, the Twin Cities will be able to protect and improve air quality for a fraction of the cost associated with ozone non-attainment, a regulatory threshold that triggers a federal program designed to control ground-level ozone. In addition, a voluntary approach means that results will come sooner than if we were to wait for EPA regulatory action, which would not be likely happen at least the next two or three years.

The evolution of Clean Air Minnesota is a model for how MEI understands its role in making environmental partnerships work. In October 2001 MEI held one of its trademark half-day policy forums to convene the first major inter-stakeholder dialogue on the risks associated with rising levels of ozone and the potential for voluntary action to mitigate those risks. As a direct result of the forum, the Minnesota Chamber of Commerce and the Minnesota Center for Environmental Advocacy began a dialogue on how to achieve voluntary reductions in ozone. Early this year, the chamber and MCEA agreed to co-chair a steering committee that included businesses, nonprofit organizations and state and local government. These partners approached MEI to organize a second event on ozone, this time bringing together 40 key stakeholders to discuss the potential for a voluntary. In May, the steering committee asked MEI to consider taking on the voluntary initiative as a program, and in response, the MEI Board of Directors formally created Clean Air Minnesota at its August meeting. Although MEI events always bring terrific value to participants and to Minnesota's environment, the results of MEI's forums on ozone demonstrate

continued >



Clean Air Minnesota Kickoff!

MEI launches its new voluntary ozone-reduction initiative

8:30 am - 3 p.m., Thursday, October 31
Discovery Hall, Science Museum of Minnesota
St. Paul

Log onto www.mn-ei.org/policy.html or call Mike Harley at 612/334-3388, ext. 107, for details.



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the tangible impacts that an MEI forum can produce. It shows in a very direct way how our dialogue-based events can be a critical first step toward partnerships to improve our environment.

Thanks to a \$100,000 grant from EPA Region 5, Clean Air Minnesota is now ready to hit the ground running with an event to publicly launch the program on October 31. EPA's financial commitment is to be matched with proportionate support from Minnesota businesses. If you are interested in helping us meet this match or you would like to become involved in the work of Clean Air Minnesota, please contact me at mharley@mn-ei.org.

- Mike Harley

MEI Stabilizes its Financial Foundation

In the aftermath of the terrorist attacks of September 11 last year and the prolonged recession, many nonprofits have seen their funding shrink and have been forced to cut costs by scaling back programs and even laying off employees. MEI has weathered the storm quite successfully. Strong support from members, cost controls and a new planning and management system meant that we have not had to reduce our employee base or cut back on programs. What's more, MEI ended up fiscal year 2001 with a surplus of \$45,000; a slightly smaller surplus is expected in 2002. Staff hopes to have a reserve fund of \$25,000 at the end of 2002. The best news, though, is that due to strong grant-raising efforts in 2002, MEI expects to be able to dramatically increase program spending in 2003 and will even add a new program (Clean Air Minnesota; see accompanying story). MEI is lucky to operate with a strong base of support from members, and building on that foundation, the organization has established the framework for financial strength in the future.

-Judd Larson



Hennepin County Commissioner Peter McLaughlin leads Met Council Chair Ted Mondale and Congressman Martin Sabo in a toast – with water – to the successful cleanup of the property at 3408 Snelling Avenue South in Minneapolis. EPA brownfields leader Linda Garczynski (not pictured) was also on hand for the August 27 event. MEI's R4R program staff worked with a broad coalition of partners to get the site assessed, cleaned up and sold (for \$1) to Twin Cities Habitat for Humanity. Habitat will begin construction of a single-family home on the property this fall.

- Dick Fowler
- Matt Haakenstad
- Dick Higgins
- Will Jensen
- Libby Johnston
- Liberty Diversified Industries
- Diane Lynch
- Minnesota Department of Trade and Economic Development
- Minnesota Office of Environmental Assistance
- Mulloy Environmental Services Inc.
- North American Wetland Engineering
- Saint Paul Neighborhood Energy Consortium
- SKB Environmental
- Jeff Smith
- Standby Systems Inc.
- V. Bruce Stenswick
- Vandervoort Public Affairs
- Washington County Department of Public Health & Environment
- The Weidt Group



Thanks Members

Thanks to the folks and organizations listed below for their membership in MEI. New and upgraded members are listed *italics*. For information on membership, contact Tracy Nordquist at 612/334-3388, ext. 101 or tnordquist@mn-ei.org.

- David Byfield
- Canadian Consulate General
- Christian Builders Inc.
- Enviroscrub Technologies Corporation
- Duaine Flanders