



MEI News

Fall 2003

Inside the Minnesota Environmental Initiative

The Momentum of Moments

I've talked a lot about what I call MEI Moments in the past few years. MEI Moments are those transcendent instances in which disparate stakeholders reach a new and common understanding of the environmental problems we face in the state; moments in which meaningful working relationships are formed to reach toward common goals; instances in which practical solutions begin to emerge for our toughest problems. MEI Moments provide the launching pad for collaborative efforts to solve problems that are too complex to be solved through traditional environmental regulation or adversarial strategies.

Achieving MEI Moments is the whole point of the dialogues that we convene on environmental issues. That's why we bring together business, government and environmental groups to struggle toward the common ground. MEI has never engaged in dialogue for dialogue's sake. It is always staff's intention to build strong working relationships among parties that must join together to overcome specific environmental challenges.

The MEI Moment is a starting point rather than an end. The true measure of MEI's success is the degree to which complex environmental problems are solved by the partnerships that we create and sustain.

MEI's staff and board have been involved in strategic planning for the past few months, and we have spent a good deal of that time reexamining the fundamentals of MEI's mission: MEI creates and sustains innovative partnerships to improve our environment. It is clear that this mission fits us more now than ever before. At the same time, there has been a call from staff, board and our members to more explicitly focus on solving complex environmental problems, and to more deliberately move our partners from those initial MEI Moments to realizing the ultimate environmental outcomes. This is a challenge that our staff and board have embraced with a sense of urgency and enthusiasm.

The focus on achieving tangible environmental outcomes is in no way a new concept to MEI, but rather something we have done for years. The new stage for the organization is realizing that an overt, written commitment to this focus is essential.

Of course, bringing together leaders from business, government and nonprofit organizations will continue to be a unique capability of the organization. But the exciting question is what MEI will

do with these incredible and powerful partnerships to benefit Minnesota's environment and its communities. That question is what motivates MEI's board and staff to reach for excellence. That question is what has drawn an unprecedented number of new members to MEI this year. That question is what makes us the right organization to tackle impaired waters, conservation improvement programs and conversion of brownfields to green-space. That question is what makes MEI the organization to watch in the next few years as Minnesotans work together for a better environment.

- Mike Harley



**MEI Executive
Director
Mike Harley**

Roads and Water Earn Policy's Efforts

The Impaired Water Stakeholder Process, Environmental Management Summit and the third installment of the 2003 Policy Forum Series will keep MEI's Environmental Policy program busy this fall. The season's big event will be a forum on transportation policy planned for early November. MEI will highlight common ground and build the partnerships necessary to achieve innovative solutions to Minnesota's significant transportation challenges. More information on the forum will be posted as it develops via email and on the Environmental Policy program's web pages.

In early July, Environmental Policy began facilitating Minnesota's Impaired Waters Stakeholder Process. With five meetings in July and August and seven more to come this fall, MEI's partners are working hard to produce a well-considered, broadly supported clean water policy that will guide the state for decades to come. By February 2004, the stakeholder process will have final recommendations for the design of an impaired-waters program for the state. Working with other state agencies, the Minnesota Pollution Control Agency will draft a bill for the 2004 session intended to lay the statutory foundation for such a program. Steve Morse is guiding the stakeholder process for MEI, with Peter Frosch acting as project manager. The project represents a significant step for the Environmental Policy program toward collaborative policy formation, while maintaining MEI's role as a nonpartisan organization.

Though temporarily preeminent, the stakeholder process is only one of the policy program's current projects. This fall will also bring two more meetings of the Environmental

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Management Summit and significant improvements to the program's web pages (www.mn-ei.org/policy/basics.html).

For more information on the stakeholder process, EMS and the Environmental Policy Forum Series, please refer to policy pages on the MEI web site at www.mn-ei.org/policy/basics.html, or contact Peter Frosch at 612-334-3388, ext.108, or pfrosch@mn-ei.org.

- Peter Frosch

Progress Toward Clean Air

In the past seven months Clean Air Minnesota and its partners have established a compelling brand identity and community presence, laying the foundation for future success. At the same time, the program already has achieved real emissions reductions that have helped program staff develop an ambitious multi-year plan to improve air quality in the Twin Cities region.

The primary goal of Clean Air Minnesota is to achieve measur-



Old 2- and 4-cycle heavy polluting mowers retired thanks to the Clean Air Minnesota, Mow Down Pollution lawnmower exchange.

able air-emissions reductions, so Clean Air Minnesota and the Minnesota Pollution Control Agency will quantify and record associated emission reductions for every action and project undertaken. The program's second goal is education and awareness.

During the last few months, the Clean Air Minnesota collaboration has:

- distributed 1,500 no-leak gas cans in the Twin Cities area, which will reduce emissions of volatile organic compounds (VOCs)



by approximately 15 pounds per day during the ozone season, according to MPCA calculations. Beyond such measurable reductions, the gas-can project also has brought new focus on Twin Cities air quality and set the model for expanded exchanges;

- organized Mow Down Pollution, a lawn mower exchange program through which individual citizens can receive discounts on electric lawn mowers by turning in their gas-powered ones. When all 100 mowers are returned, Clean Air Minnesota's emissions-reductions efforts and encouraging staff, citizens and businesses to follow Clean Air Minnesota's clean-air recommendations;
- begun work with the MPCA to quantify the results of the Agency's internal action plan implementing emissions-reductions strategies consistent with Clean Air Minnesota's mission; Clean Air Minnesota will also work to get other state agencies to adopt similar action plans.

Since its June 3 kickoff, Clean Air Minnesota has been featured in media including the Star Tribune, Pioneer Press, Minnesota Public Radio and a number of major television and radio stations. Partners estimate that nearly 2 million readers, viewers and listeners have been exposed to Clean Air Minnesota's message.

Working with its partners, Clean Air Minnesota has established the following primary goals for the end of 2003:

- Obtain 100 Clean Air Minnesota partners with emission reduction commitments.
- Establish emission reduction goals with input from the Steering Committee and Project Teams.
- Identify, prioritize and implement emission reduction projects that will produce the greatest gain.

Clean Air Minnesota is a complex, difficult, exciting endeavor that is keeping Minnesota on the cutting edge of environmental work. The program will continue to work as a catalyst for innovative partnerships to improve the region's air quality.

- Colleen Coyne



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EA Hits the Library

In November, Energy Alley will be taking an important step toward identifying and prioritizing Minnesota's research in new renewable energy technologies.

MEI will be holding an all-day conference, Minnesota's Renewable Energy Research: Status and Opportunities, that will seek to identify specific strengths and gaps in local research capacity. The conference is designed to help develop a technology market in Minnesota that will allow the state to compete regionally, nationally and internationally. By shedding light on Minnesota's strengths and market opportunities, the conference will provide valuable information to industry, new startup businesses, the investment community and policymakers.



The conference will be hosted in partnership with the University of Minnesota's new Initiative for Renewable Energy and the Environment, which is

in a unique position to define and fund its own research priorities.

The agenda for Minnesota's Renewable Energy Research includes an overview of the university's research to date, a poster session of Minnesota-based research and a facilitated discussion of the state's strengths, gaps and opportunities. For more information, please call Erik Pratt at 612-334-3388, ext. 102.

- Erik Pratt

Grounded Vision

The Resources for Redevelopment (R4R) program reinvents itself, adapting a little bit to fit each new project. But the fundamental idea driving the program never changes: smart land use.

The removal of contamination is only a part of why brownfield redevelopment is an environmental improvement. By promoting wise development choices, minimizing impact on the land, working to curb urban sprawl and encouraging Minnesota to be conscious of the environmental impact growth can have, R4R continues to make great steps in revitalizing Minnesota's communities. Each R4R redevelopment project – whether for a nonprofit reuse, affordable housing or green/open space – not only changes an eyesore into an asset, but helps local organizations and residents stay in the city core. Each effort means one less development on the fringe, keeping people closer to jobs and services, and decreased

travel times, reducing congestion and air pollution.

In particular, creation of greenspace (R4R's newest endeavor) provides a buffer for noise pollution, absorbs heat and carbon dioxide while adding oxygen to the air.

Permeable, vegetated surfaces act as a filter while recharging the water table and decreasing the amount of runoff into local sewers, lakes and streams. By creating a natural haven, communities are invigorated, habitat is created for both flora and fauna and human health is improved.



Through its successful alternative redevelopment model, focused on community needs instead of cleanup goals, R4R continues to provide assistance for projects that benefit both communities and the environment.

With the assistance of the US Environmental Protection Agency, the Metropolitan Council, the McKnight Foundation, Hennepin County, the Legislative Commission on Minnesota Resources and several other private funders, R4R will continue to make great strides in restoring the vitality of land in Minnesota.

If you are aware of a potential brownfield site that could be redeveloped for greenspace, a nonprofit reuse or affordable housing, please contact either Michael Welch at 612-334-3388 ext. 107, mwelch@mn-ei.org or Megan Dobratz, ext. 104, mdobratz@mn-ei.org

- Megan Dobratz

MEI Grows Crazy

MEI has another new staff member. Suzy Knutson has joined MEI's ranks as administrative assistant. Coming to MEI with an extensive background in administrative work, most recently with Thrivent Financial for Lutherans, Suzy has been a great addition to the organization. You can reach her at 612-334-3388, ext.100, or sknutson@mn-ei.org.

Thanks, Members

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

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3M
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 Kathy Tingelstad
 Donald A. Wallgren
Charles Wolff

MEI's work improves the quality of life for you and all Minnesotans. We are working to lessen smog in Minnesota's air, reduce pollutants in Minnesota's lakes, rivers and streams, improve energy conservation in our state and create new parks and green-space throughout Minnesota. By joining the Minnesota Environmental Initiative, you can be sure that your contribution will make a positive impact on Minnesota's environment.

I've enclosed my membership contribution to support the Minnesota Environmental Initiative!

\$35 Individual \$295 Small business/government/nonprofit
 \$95 Individual \$550 Corporation Other \$ _____

Name _____

Organization _____

Address _____

City, State, ZIP _____

Phone _____ Email _____

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 Please contact Tracy Nordquist, ext. 101, or tnordquist@mn-ei.org with questions or for more information.