

CARBON PROOF MEETINGS

A major gathering of environmentalists and business leaders took place in California in April. Coordinated by Fortune Magazine it was called Brainstorm Green. When the presidents of the Fortune 500 and the leaders of America's strongest environmental activist organizations agreed to have a meeting on green economy opportunities, the first decision involved how to conduct the meeting. Discussions resulted in a framework agreement for the conduct of environmentally responsible meetings. The following are some of the guidelines agreed to for green conference structure.

For guest arrival and departure, the check-ins were paperless. Hybrid vehicles were used for ground transportation and idling of transport vehicles was discouraged.

convention centres as creators of huge environmental footprints

TRAVELLING TOXIC THREAT

Named for a fleet-footed winged god from Greek mythology, mercury is actually a heavy, slow moving and deadly neurotoxin. This year, representatives from over 140 countries made a commitment to reduce global mercury pollution through a coordinated effort around the globe to reduce both the use and release of mercury into the air, water and land mass.

As a follow-up, the United Nations Environment Program Governing Council will now develop a legally binding international treaty to be in place by 2013.

grave health effects including restricted brain development

The treaty will stipulate actions to reduce the intentional use of mercury in industrial processes and products and reduce emissions from coal plants and smelters. The intent of the legislation is to reduce mercury contamination in fish, in the water system and cut down on human exposure.

Although slow moving, mercury travels widely. It moves thousands of miles from its original source by traveling through the air and water and accumulating in large predatory fish. In turn, people consuming these fish, such as tuna, can be affected by grave health effects including restricted brain development.

On a world-wide basis, coal-fired power plants are the largest source of mercury air emissions. Each year in the United States, 50 tons of mercury pollution is emitted every year from the more than 600 coal plants in the country. Currently in China, coal-fired power plants provide 75 per cent of the country's energy. In the next eight years China plans to add over 500 new coal plants, almost as many as currently exist in the United States. This translates into one new coal plant per week until 2017.

Other sources of mercury emissions include chemical manufacturing facilities in Europe, India and China as well as small scale gold mines in the developing world.

An international coalition called the Zero Mercury Working Group comprised of 75 non-governmental organizations has been the moving force behind the international legislation to reduce mercury pollution. The group has guided the United Nations in coordinating a response and setting the platform for legislation.

one new coal plant per week until 2017

HOW MANY LIGHT BULBS DOES IT TAKE TO EQUAL A COAL PLANT?

All guest rooms were to offer in-room recycling, encourage the reuse of linens and donate unused room amenities such as shampoos to local shelters. In addition, the hotel was directed only to deliver newspapers to rooms upon request.

In meeting rooms, plastic and paper were disallowed at all meal functions. In addition, lighting and air conditioning levels were reduced and meeting space was oxygenated with live plants. For food and beverage service, food waste was composted and excess food delivered to a local food program.

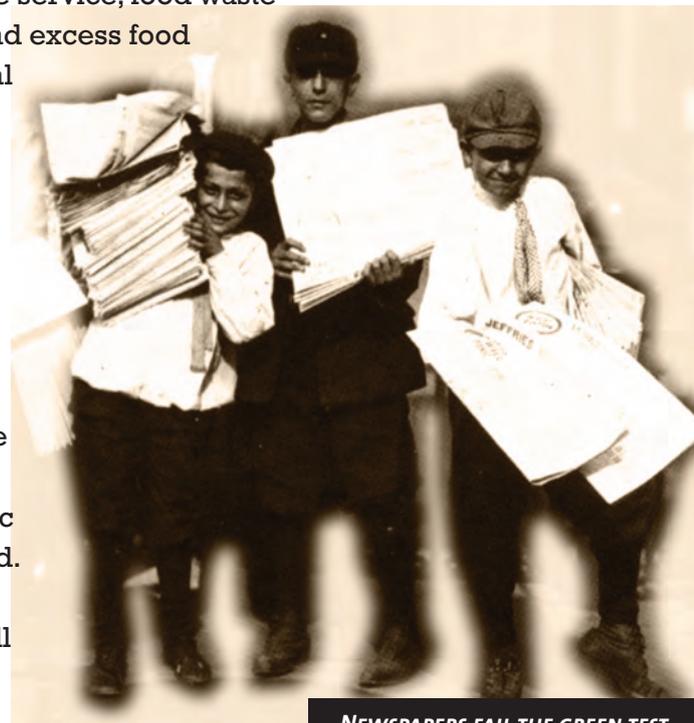
Menus were developed using organic produce from sustainable local farmers. All coffee needed to be Rainforest Alliance certified and teas were to be Organic Fair Trade certified. In the conference business centre, all printers were set to print two-sided using recycled printer cartridges.

Computers were also programmed to go into sleep mode every few minutes.

For staff training, all hotel staff were given advance training in green standards including the use of non-toxic cleaning products. For marketing and promotion, email communication was used exclusively with recipients encouraged not to print.

The environmental community has long viewed convention centres as creators of huge environmental footprints. Delegates arriving by plane and other forms of transportation, staying in air conditioned rooms and spending the day watching audiovisual displays in climate controlled auditoriums combine to create large carbon emissions. The controlling principle behind the green meeting guideline document was based on the view that much could be done in terms of the way meetings were actually conducted.

Measures to offset the carbon intensive process involve getting people to meetings and accommodating them while they are there and go farther than meek requests to use towels twice.



NEWSPAPERS FAIL THE GREEN TEST

ILLUMINATING FACTS

North Americans purchase over two billion light bulbs per year. Public policy throughout North America is moving towards the requirement to replace conventional light bulbs with compact fluorescent lights or CFLs. These CFLs contain a tiny portion of mercury – about five milligrams which is equivalent to the tip of a ball point pen. Even though the amount of mercury is small, the Environmental Protection Agency in the United States, as well as most environmental agencies in North America, has stipulated strict requirements for the disposal of CFLs, particularly if they break while in use.

How much mercury would be involved if all two billion plus light bulbs purchased annually in North America were replaced with CFLs? At five milligrams per light bulb, the amount of mercury in two billion CFLs would equal 10 tons, or the equivalent amount of mercury that is emitted by 100 coal-powered electric plants.