

Summary of speech

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The role of industry in the sustainable management of fresh water resources

The World Business Council for Sustainable Development (WBCSD) recognizes that business has an important opportunity to contribute to the sustainable use of the world's water resources.

The WBCSD is a coalition of more than 120 international companies that share a commitment to the environment and to the principles of economic growth and sustainable development. With members in 36 countries representing more than 20 major industrial sectors, the WBCSD is a powerful business voice on sustainable development issues - and plays an important role in developing closer co-operation between business, government and others, encouraging high standards of environmental management in business itself, and developing the framework conditions for business to operate in a sustainable manner.

To work towards this end, the Council has established a working group to review the key debates about water and policy options for industry. The working group consists of WBCSD member companies and thus incorporates the views of leading business. The project has as its goal to develop a role for industry in the management of fresh water resources, today and tomorrow. Although still in the very early stages of planning, the working group has identified three key areas to concentrate its activities:

- release of a discussion paper on the role of business in sustainable water management to develop the issue amongst the membership;
- the development of a benchmark publication on water management for late-1997, in conjunction with UNEP, and incorporating up-to-date examples of water management from WBCSD members; and
- the dissemination of best industry practice in water management to regional WBCSD members, particularly in developing countries.

The role of industry

Five main areas have been identified by the WBCSD discussion paper where industry has the greatest opportunity to contribute positively to solutions in water management and these are listed below:

- improving water management practices and technology within companies, such as water conservation and “zero emission” technology;
- possibility of re-location of industry to areas where water access is guaranteed, and the option of re-use of urban water for industrial purposes;
- improving the communication of best practice water management to other catchment water users to generate trust and commercial opportunities, in particular in the developing world;
- participating in the development of responsible water policy - such as removal of water subsidies and economic water pricing, developing new industry incentives for improved water management; and
- research into water management practice and technologies.