

POINT OF VIEW

Different shades of Green

The World is at long last changing. We are now serious about protecting the Earth and future generations. Green is the color of the next decades and hopefully something will really be done to protect the future of our children and humanity as a whole.

Guy Goldstein

I am writing these few words before the Copenhagen Summit, so ahead of – hopefully – major decisions for the future of the next generations. For a couple of centuries since the industrial revolution, no one really cared about the environment and the industry developed overlooking – through ignorance – the need to protect it. The alarm started ringing more than a decade ago and filled newspapers, radio and TV. The means available to assess the situation all concurred in creating the disaster we are facing. From space we could measure the extent of the catastrophe. We are running late, many countries still use fossil fuels and generate tons of CO₂, and they are not by far the smallest countries on earth!

WHAT HAS OUR TISSUE INDUSTRY BEEN DOING? Actually the paper industry has been in the forefront of the green movement – not always appreciated by the various Green movements but... Recycling has been pro-eminent, reforestation a major aim for saving our potential future and wealth. Energy has had a big impact as oil is depleting, the use of coal is still the choice in such big countries as the USA, China, India and some European states. The pulp we need is often energy sufficient because of the bark and the black liquor being burnt; we turned to oxygen bleaching in an orderly way; we more or less abandoned the sulfite process and its issues.

IN EUROPE FAIRLY EARLY IN 1992, THE ECO-LABEL WAS ADOPTED AS A SIGN OF RECOGNITION FOR PEOPLE WHO CARED. There were competitive logos created, too: Blue Angel, White Swan, etc. ... They became a marketing item for some companies but also the actual proof that we were concerned. Strangely enough, it was not easily adopted by the "Big Four" of the industry, but rather by smaller, forward-looking companies, like for example Lucart of Italy, but also producers of private label and AFH products where cost in use is what's important. I believe what was looked at as a gimmick then now constitutes proof that these companies were already concerned and though they might have seen a short-term advantage, in fact they were looking forward.

THIS MOVEMENT WAS NOT, OF COURSE, LIMITED TO EUROPE. In North America, companies like Marcal, Cascades and Fort Howard led the way forward because of the limited resources available to purchase virgin pulp and also because of their history as a waste paper collector, or even because of their local political environment and the sales advantage they could generate from a portion of the public. These companies have grown and today have a major impact on our industry. These companies were right, the economic advantage is not always in favor of recycling, and even if I am persuaded they were really and truly good citizens, they always worked in the right direction and they need to be applauded.

THE INDUSTRY WENT TO CLEANER PULPS, no chlorine bleaching, less sulfite, forest stewardship, cleaner fuels etc. ... Is it enough? The laws protecting forests date back to Carolus Magnus (around 800 A.D.) but most recent laws were introduced in the mid-1940s in the US as well as for the Tropical forests of Africa and South America. No, it's certainly not enough. But in order to keep a clean competition, they need to be implemented everywhere in the same manner.
THE PAPER/TISSUE INDUSTRY SHOULD NOT BE THE ONLY ONE TO BLAME. Sure efforts must be made to minimize

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transportation-related CO₂ issues. We believed the high cost of oil would make producers more prone to manufacturing close to consumption centers: it was short lived since the price of petrol went down again. Good ideas, no implementation! It will certainly be re-visited shortly as petrol is running short and with prices dependent on demand, there are no reasons for long-term stability.

WHAT CAN WE DO? WE NEED TO REVIEW ALL MANUFACTURING STEPS. Economies are available everywhere, now better process managements are providing energy savings of 30% or more, lower water consumption, lower usage of chemicals, tons of dollars to be saved as well as less greenhouse gas produced. Some investments are needed but the payback is short and relevant: can every company do it? Our industry has really shown responsibility all along – maybe not the best students, but at least those concerned and helpful. Incentives are likely to be put in place to help resolve these issues, but again it will depend on political issues. Will the US force its industries to invest? Will China do the same? No distortion should be allowed in terms of competition, every one with the same obligations and guaranteed results to be audited independently.

IN TERMS OF ENERGY: GREENER BUT NOT TO THE DETRIMENT OF FOOD SUPPLY, more wind farms, more hydraulic power, maybe more atomic power plants which are known to have little or no impact on the environment, provided safety regulations are enforced. Many atomic power plants have been running for 30+ years without safety issues and the new generation promises even easier, safer maintenance. But certainly some European countries have decided to go without, which might not be a reasonable choice but a political one. We also need mid-term solutions to clean up the atmosphere of newly generated CO₂; trees and vegetation do help but it is a rather slow process.

IDEAS HAVE BEEN PUT FORWARD TO USE THE EMPTY GAS FIELDS AND INJECT COMPRESSED CO₂ INTO THEM. The EU believes carbon storage could shave 10% off global emissions by 2030 and 20% by 2050. The European Union has already pledged ?1+ billion in initial financing and will raise another ?4.5 billion from selling permits to emit greenhouse gases under a cap and trade system where companies need to pay to pollute more. This scheme is particularly attractive to countries that have a lot of coal such as the United States and China. They could cut emissions while using their cheap fuel instead of imported oil.

ROYAL DUTCH SHELL, TOTAL – whose gas fields are depleted – are experimenting with the help of their respective governments. Carbon Capture and Storage (CCS) has a major issue which is a local one. It's the "Not in my back garden..." syndrome since it could affect housing prices. This will drive up the price of energy but could provide a solution. The locals are putting in front the accident in 1986 when 1700 people died in Cameroon when a cloud of carbon dioxide escaped from a volcanic lake. But carbon dioxide is not all that dangerous; let's not forget it provides the fizz in all soft drinks and is naturally present in the atmosphere! The confined spaces which have held gas for millions of years are safe, and they would be fairly easy to monitor since the gas input would most likely be the modified outputs. A lot of convincing needs to be done so that the project is acceptable to the public. We are to experience different shades of Green as we go along... but wouldn't it be nice to see Blue at the end of the tunnel? •

The Copenhagen Summit

"No real agreement has been reached, the biggest polluters, the US, China and India, have refused any commitments to lower their CO₂ emissions. We shall have to wait until the Mexico Summit in a year's time. What a deception but understandable in times of crisis. No one wants to endanger its industries but they don't care about the rest of the World. The 2009 Peace Nobel price winner did not budge in spite of the promises he made over and over again, the industrial's lobby is working.

No one really cares about the poorest countries which are going to be the most impacted by Global Warming. Food is going to be scarce and we won't be able to feed the world. Already in Africa the death rate for children is close to 50% and those who barely survive do not really have a future. By just attending the meeting the delegates emitted the equivalent CO₂ from the flights to the yearly production of CO₂ ... by a city of 60,000 people!"