

Michael F. Easley, Governor



William G. Ross Jr., Secretary

N.C. Department of Environment and Natural Resources

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Contact: Diana Kees, (919) 715-6515
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STATE INITIATIVE ENCOURAGES ENVIRONMENTALLY FRIENDLY BUSINESS PRACTICES

RALEIGH – The N.C. Department of Environment and Natural Resources is looking for environmental partners – and today on Earth Day invites members of the state’s business community to apply for membership in a new voluntary program designed to promote and encourage superior environmental performance.

The Environmental Stewardship Initiative establishes incentives to stimulate business, industry, government agencies and nonprofits to develop and implement programs that use pollution prevention and other innovative approaches to meet and exceed their regulatory requirements. This program seeks to reduce the impact on the environment beyond measures required by any permit or rule, producing a better environment and a stronger economy and conserving natural resources.

“Stewardship of our state's natural resources is more critical than ever,” Gov. Mike Easley said. “We must protect and preserve the air we breathe and the water that we drink. This partnering program is an important step in improving the quality of North Carolina's environment and our overall quality of life.”

Participants can become involved at one of two levels. The “Environmental Partner” level is designed for adoption by a broad range of organizations that are interested in beginning the process of developing a systematic approach to improving their environmental performance. Partners must set environmental performance goals that include pollution prevention and are appropriate to the nature, scale and environmental impact of the organization.

The “Environmental Steward” level is for those organizations that already display a commitment to exemplary environmental performance beyond what is required by law. Stewards will be required to set aggressive environmental performance goals that include pollution prevention, a commitment to exceed compliance, and annual improvements to performance. These goals should result in reductions of an organization’s environmental impact consistent with sustainability principles. Both partners and stewards must agree to report annually on progress towards the organization’s environmental performance goals, net reductions of releases, emissions and disposal, net reductions in the use of energy and water, and any reportable non-compliance events.

“This initiative will encourage North Carolina organizations to move beyond compliance and toward environmental sustainability by using a systematic approach to environmental performance,” said Secretary Bill Ross of the Department of Environment and Natural Resources. “That movement will result in a cleaner environment and a stronger economy. The Environmental Stewardship Initiative will encourage organizations with a commitment to environmental protection to find ways to become more effective stewards of our natural resources.”

A 10-member advisory workgroup appointed by Ross will oversee program development and implementation. Membership consists of individuals from manufacturers, industries, industry trade groups, environmental and citizen nongovernmental organizations, and small businesses. An internal DENR workgroup will provide technical support and coordination for the advisory workgroup and the overall initiative.

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Office of Public Affairs
Phone (919) 715-4112
1601 Mail Service Center, Raleigh, NC 27699-1601

Don Reuter, Director
FAX (919) 715-5181
don.reuter@ncmail.net

Any company or organization that operates one or more facilities in North Carolina is eligible to participate in the initiative. This includes but is not limited to manufacturers, businesses, agribusiness, service providers, government agencies, schools and nonprofit agencies. Applications for the first round of this program will be accepted until July 31. An announcement of those accepted into the program is expected by late October.

“Integrating environmentally friendly practices into core functions is a smart way to do business,” said Secretary Jim Fain of the Department of Commerce. “This program will recognize the many North Carolina businesses that are working hard to avoid depletion of natural resources, and encourage others to realize that waste reduction and pollution prevention can increase profit margins and in some cases provide businesses with a competitive advantage.”

For more detailed information or to apply for the program, please visit the Environmental Stewardship Initiative Web site at <http://www.p2pays.org/esi> or contact Beth Graves of the Division of Pollution Prevention and Environmental Assistance, at (919) 715-6506 or beth.graves@ncmail.net.

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