

# The International Metals Study Groups' Work on Sustainable Development

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**A**n intergovernmental consultative forum was established in September 2000 to examine the role of nonferrous metals in sustainable development. This initiative was launched by the members of the International Copper Study Group, the International Lead and Zinc Study Group and the International Nickel Study Group. These three autonomous, United Nations-affiliated intergovernmental organizations were set up to provide accurate and timely statistical and other data on the production, use and trade of the four principal nonferrous metals.

The 38 governments involved in the Study Groups and this initiative are those with an interest – whether as producers or users – in ores, concentrates and metals. This initiative covers issues relating to the entire life cycle of metals in the context of sustainable development, and will help promote a better understanding of the contribution that nonferrous metals can make to sustainable development.

## **RATIONALE FOR THE INITIATIVE**

Sustainable development provides a useful policy framework for governments to help provide future generations with as many options for development as are available to the present generation. Sustainable development can be pursued through policies that integrate social, economic and environmental considerations into the decision-making process.

Issues that affect one metal are often common to another; for example, a product restriction on one metal could have an adverse impact with regard to another metal, especially when the two are co-produced. Many countries have widely differing views on the environmental impacts of metals. Some

views could have significant implications for the continuing use of the metals in many applications with clear adverse repercussions for other countries involved in the production chain.

It is essential that the full spectrum of national opinion be engaged to ensure the safe production, use, recycling and disposal of nonferrous metals. Working together, the three Study Groups provide a unique forum for governments from across the globe to discuss cross-metal social, economic and environmental issues with industry, multilateral institutions and other stakeholder groups.

## **ACTIVITIES**

The Study Groups first convened a Workshop on Sustainable Development in London (U.K.) in late 1999. Workshop participants agreed to consider the possible role of the Study Groups in examining the potential contribution of mining and metals to sustainable development. They decided to establish the Non-Ferrous Consultative Forum on Sustainable Development in order to develop an action plan. They also agreed that the process should involve dialogue and cooperation among all stakeholders, including governments, industry, environmental and other non-governmental organizations (NGOs), local communities (representing indigenous and other people affected by all production stages), and users themselves.

The first meeting of the Forum was held in Brussels on September 28-29, 2000. It was co-chaired by Sauli Rouhinen, Ministry of Environment, Finland, and Alek Ignatow, Department of Natural Resources, Canada. The European Commission acted as host. Representatives from all major stakeholder groups were involved; some 90 delegates from 22 countries attended, including nine representatives from environmental and social NGOs. The discussions generated a list of recommended activities within the following six areas:

- stewardship programs,
- community consultation and involvement,
- promotion of recycling,
- research and development,

- open and transparent mechanisms to improve communication, and
- information development and dissemination for decision-making.

Reflecting the strong desire of the participants to achieve visible and rapid progress, three ad-hoc working groups were established to consider all the recommendations that emerged during the Forum and to act on those of common interest to all represented stakeholders. The three working groups are respectively focusing on:

- production of nonferrous metals,
- product stewardship, and
- science, research and development.

Each working group has co-chairs from government, industry and NGOs, and their mandate is to work on a consensus basis. Group members have established work plans and draw from existing work, share information, identify gaps, and rapidly initiate activities, taking into account the recommendations from the Forum. Each working group receives secretariat support from one of the three Study Groups. The Forum meets on an ad-hoc basis to monitor and review progress. The second meeting of the Forum was held in Porto, Portugal, on November 12-13, 2001. The Chairmen's summary follows this review.

Full contact addresses of the Study Groups and details of all the actions taken to date, including the London, Brussels and Porto meetings, are available on the Internet at [www.nfmsd.org](http://www.nfmsd.org). Anyone with an interest in ensuring that nonferrous metals are available for future generations is welcome to support one or more of these multi-stakeholder groups.