

PROTOTYPE NEWSLETTER ARTICLE

11-96-01

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A new spirit of cooperation is emerging between government, industry and labor. The latest labor/auto industry accord is perhaps a leading indicator of more to come. Reminiscent the Japanese cooperative experience that has been partially responsible for their competitive edge in international trade, this approach can benefit both industry and labor. It is like a breath of fresh air in an otherwise stagnant atmosphere.

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency has been successfully and quietly administering a market prototype program referred to as "Buy Quiet Program" (bq). With strong support from the National Institute of Governmental Purchasing, and other institutions, purchasers of equipment are shown that quieter, more efficient and cleaner products are available or could become available if properly specified. Rather than interfering with the market by involving the producers and purchasers in lengthy regulatory processes, knowledge and organization is provided and marketed to both government and industry buyers. They are thus creating a new market for improved products.

The results speak for themselves. Producers with better products are able to sell millions of dollars worth of improved products in relatively new markets. Purchasers of equipment find that they are able to obtain better products at competitive prices. Users of the equipment experience an improved work environment and enhanced productivity, morale and health.

But there can also be losers. Producers and suppliers who fail to respond with changed product designs that result in quieter, safer, lower polluting products will lose sales in this market. But that itself should be incentive enough to give them a different production and marketing orientation.

The First National Conference on Buying Quiet (held on March 24, 1982, in Arlington Virginia) was organized to demonstrate the Buy Quiet approach. Quieted equipment, including heavy trucks, air compressors, solid waste compactors, alternative fuel light vehicles, motorcycles and lawnmowers, among others, were assembled for inspection and demonstration. Buyers and sellers concurred that both benefited by cooperating through the market, rather than getting caught up in regulatory mazes. They concluded that this Buy Quiet experience should be extended to other areas, like safety, energy efficiency, and other pollution problems, to name a few, without establishing another layer of bureaucracy. While they admitted that this type of voluntarism will not solve all problems or eliminate the need for all regulations, the flexibility inherent in this type of voluntary program can never be matched by inflexible regulations. Moreover, this approach avoids regulation-induced market distortions and at times draws on available technology to advance equipment quality.

It is hoped that this "quiet" baby will not get washed away with EPA budget cuts. Certainly, this approach in combination with other devices will make the government more efficient and provide a ray of sunshine in otherwise discouraging economic and environmental news.