

Open days on 21st and 22nd October 2006 Sustainable development: *Focus on copper*

The 2nd edition of the Belgian "sustainable development open day weekend" will provide an opportunity to discover sustainable manufacturing processes, products and services. This initiative is part of the "Buy Smart" campaign which was launched on 15th March 2006 to encourage companies and consumers to adopt more responsible ethical and ecological behaviours. Changing the world through small every-day actions (supporting socially responsible companies, using recyclable carrier bags, buying organic products...) is not only possible, but has also caught the public's imagination. The time has now come for eco-friendly behaviour.

The future of our world relies on reducing our energy consumption, using environmentally friendly products and managing waste through recycling end of life equipment. Copper is essential for "sustainable producers" that support good environmental practices.

Reducing energy losses - the benefits of copper! Aside from its great durability which can stretch from a few years to several hundred years depending on what it is being used for, copper's properties play a major role in the construction industry and especially in the performance of buildings. This sector alone accounts for 40% of the energy consumed in the European Union. This energy is partially wasted due to inefficient heating and lighting systems. As the best electrical conductor among all non-precious metals, copper can help to reduce our energy bills. For instance, increasing the amount of copper in electrical applications such as motors and transformers reduces energy losses up to 70% and improves output. A study published in April 2004, as part of the European Commission's 'Motor Challenge' programme, showed that more than 200 billion Kwh could be saved every year in Europe through the use of energy efficient motor driven systems. This would reduce our CO₂ emissions by 100 million tonnes per year, which is more than one quarter of Europe's Kyoto commitment.

Recycling. Reusing waste by reprocessing it into something useful is now a key challenge for our society. According to the European Environment Agency, by 2020, Europeans will be throwing away 45% more waste than in 1995. In 2003, 140 million computers were sold around the world. This figure, which is constantly rising, corresponds to the equivalent of a mine producing more than 210,000 tonnes of copper per year. Computers and mobile phones alone now represent 4% of the European Union's total waste production, which adds up to 7.4 million tonnes¹! Copper makes up 5 – 18% of the weight of all this new equipment. What good luck! Copper is 100% recyclable, with no loss of performance and restriction of use. Copper can be used and reused indefinitely. Furthermore, the recycling process allows up to an 85% energy saving compared to producing copper from a mine. At the end of 2004, world demand for copper increased by 5.4%, reaching 22.45 million tonnes. In Europe, 41% of the demand (i.e. more than two million tonnes of copper) was met via recycling. This included equipment that had reached the end of its life, such as wires and cables, IT and electronic equipment, plumbing fittings and household equipment.

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¹ Source: working group on the European Union's WEEE, 2004.