

# LANDMARK ENVIRONMENTAL AGREEMENT WITH METAL FINISHING INDUSTRY REACHED UNDER REINVENTION INITIATIVE

Release date: 10/27/97

Contact Information:

FOR RELEASE: MONDAY, OCTOBER 27, 1997  
LANDMARK ENVIRONMENTAL AGREEMENT  
WITH METAL FINISHING INDUSTRY  
REACHED UNDER REINVENTION INITIATIVE

U.S. EPA Administrator Carol M. Browner today visited a metal finishing facility in Providence, R.I., to announce a milestone agreement for reinventing environmental regulation in the metal finishing industry. The agreement is the first reached by industry, community and government leaders under the Common Sense Initiative -- EPA's flagship program for developing more flexible industry-by-industry approaches to environmental protection as an alternative to the one-size-fits-all, pollutant-by-pollutant approaches of the past.

Browner was joined by U.S. Senators John Chafee (R-R.I.) and Jack Reed (D-R.I.) and U.S. Representatives Patrick Kennedy (D-R.I.) and Robert Weygand (D-R.I.) at the Victory Finishing Technologies, Inc. plant in South Providence.

Under the agreement, known as the Metal Finishing Strategic Goals Program, metal finishers are committing to substantially reduce pollution beyond what is required by environmental laws nationally. The industry has agreed to several goals, including:

- Cutting chemical releases, such as volatile organic compounds, by about three-fourths compared to 1992 levels -- from more than 8,000 tons to 2,200 tons to air and from about 250 tons to 70 tons for water;
- Reducing metal releases, such as copper, by about 40 percent -- from 60 tons to 36 tons for air and from 173 tons to 104 tons for water;
- Cutting hazardous sludge, now disposed in the land, by about 40 percent -- from 500,000 tons to less than 300,000 tons a year;
- Cutting energy and water use at participating firms by 50 and 25 percent, respectively; and,
- Ensuring an 80 percent participation rate by companies within the industry.

"Today's agreement underscores the Clinton Administration's commitment to both a healthy environment and a thriving economy," said Administrator Browner. "For three years, members of the metal finishing industry along with federal, state and local government officials, environmentalists and community leaders have joined together to find solutions that work for the industry and for the environment. The result will be more protection of public health for communities and greater flexibility for industry in complying with environmental laws. I commend and thank the metal finishing industry for its leadership in developing this comprehensive program, leading the way for other industries to follow."

"The EPA's Common Sense Initiative demonstrates what I've always believed -- that environmental protection and economic development need not be at odds with one another. Indeed, great things can be accomplished when government and industry work together toward our common goals of a strong environment and sound economy," said Senator Chafee.

“This agreement with the metal finishing industry will help facilities that need compliance assistance by teaming them with strong performers. It also will help generate support for strong enforcement against those firms with chronic compliance problems,” said Senator Reed.

Launched by Browner in 1994 as part of the Clinton Administration's efforts, CSI is a fundamentally different approach to environmental protection. In contrast to the traditional system, which controls pollution to air, water, and land separately, and which typically results in one-size-fits-all regulations on all sources, CSI uses a consensus approach to engage multiple stakeholders in looking at all aspects of an industry's performance. This approach leads to more flexible, cost-effective and environmentally-protective solutions tailored to industries' needs. Moreover, by involving all stakeholders up front, CSI helps avoid challenges in court, ultimately paving the way for faster, cheaper results.

In addition to the metal finishers, CSI is engaging five other industries in testing industry-based approaches. These industries, which represent a broad cross-section of American business interests, include: automobiles, computers and electronics, iron and steel, printing, and oil refining.

Under today's agreement, EPA will provide top-performing metal finishing facilities with more flexibility within the current regulatory system. State and local governments will provide compliance and pollution prevention assistance, particularly in meeting wastewater pretreatment requirements under the Clean Water Act. Industry trade associations will promote the program and encourage participation among their members while environmental and public interest groups have pledged to publicly recognize participating firms for their environmental performance.

Nationally, the metal finishing industry consists of 3,000, mostly small service businesses with limited capital and employees, and 8,000 “captive” metal finishing operations within larger manufacturing plants. Together, these operations provide protective or decorative metal coatings on a variety of consumer and industrial parts and products -- from plumbing fixtures to computer hardware to aeronautical components.