

SME eco-competitiveness for market access

Securing access to markets is vital for SMEs to survive. However, SMEs have been experiencing difficulty in achieving this due to the increasing number of laws and regulations. To address this issue, the APO and SPRING Singapore organized a study meeting on Market Access for SMEs in the Electric and Electronic Sector in Singapore, 11–14 August. The meeting provided updated, practical, useful information on new EU environmental regulations and directives. They include the Restriction on the Use of Certain Hazardous Substance (RoHS); the Registration, Evaluation, Authorization and Restriction of Chemicals (REACH); and the Eco-design Requirements for Energy-using Products (EuP). The EuP in particular have affected the global supply chains of the electric and electronic industry from large corporations to SMEs.

“Eco-competitiveness is a business matter,” declared Senior Manager Yoshiaki Ichikawa, Hitachi, Ltd., as he listed existing regulations during his presentation. “Environmental compatibility has become a major competitive edge for all products and services around the world.” He went on to explain the background and requirements of the EuP and detailed their implementation measures. General Electric Healthcare’s Global Regulatory Manager Beth A. Hulse stressed the importance of self-regulation of eco-design requirements and explained how the medical device industry meets those self-regulatory requirements.

Study meeting participants recognized the difficulties many SMEs face in meeting such environmental regulatory requirements. Difficulties include: a lack of knowledge or understanding of the new regulations; costs associated with complying with the regulations; a lack of information on supply chain management systems; and resource limitations. In group discussions, the

participants exchanged ideas and practices that could support SMEs in managing these challenges. Participants pointed out the need to establish internationally consistent standards. They also produced a list of recommendations including the need for governmental assistance with training in regulations; a supply chain database of regulation-compliant parts; and partnerships between multinational corporations and SMEs.



Visiting the Singapore Institute of Manufacturing Technology, a national R&D institute

The meeting identified best practices showing how a government could provide SMEs with the necessary information on new regulations such as the SPRING *Guidebook on RoHS and REACH* and a Korean governmental agency Web site. Participants also voiced their appreciation of the APO’s new initiative of publishing how-to manuals for use by SMEs. The APO publication *RoHS Manual for SMEs* was welcomed by many participants as an important handbook for SMEs and others. 