



Have you ever considered the ecological effects of the travel and tourism industry?

Take for example, air travel, which alone contributes to global warming and noise and air pollution. Air travel is a major source of waste, uses a vast amount of fossil fuels and chemical solvents, and struggles with daily problems such as kerosene spillage during refuelling operations. In 1997, over 1.4 billion passengers traveled by plane. In the next fifteen years, the aviation industry is predicted to grow by 6% every year.¹

Today, the aviation industry is feeling increasing exigency to change its ways. The area of most public concern is the impact CO² emissions are having on climate change. In addition to the anticipated rules ensuing from the 1992 Kyoto Protocol, the industry is feeling pressure from the environmental community, the European Union Commission, and from a number of European governments namely Germany, Austria, Belgium, and Switzerland, who are all in support of taxing aviation fuel.

Air BP is a business unit of the BP Amoco Group and the world's third-largest supplier of aviation fuel. It operates in over 1,400 locations in 87 countries. Air BP is also committed to fostering sustainable development throughout its business and decreasing the environmental impact of its operations. In addition to having personal environmental sensitivities, the Chief Executives of BP Amoco (Sir John Browne) and Air BP (Vivienne Cox) both recognize the strategic business benefits of adopting environmental initiatives.

The goal is to lead in a highly competitive marketplace by selling cleaner fuel and having better safety and sustainability credentials. Vivienne Cox remarks, "I respect 'deep green' views and I recognize the wider shift in consumer opinion in favor of clean fuels which do no damage to the natural environment." With this understanding, Cox plans to leverage Air BP's position as an industry leader. "For us, fuel quality is a fundamental service we provide our customers and I'm determined that Air BP should set the standard for the whole industry."

Why do they think this is possible? Cox explains, "We believe we can be a leader in providing fuels of that quality, and TNS is a helpful, pragmatic approach which recognizes the business realities without compromising the objective." At the same time, "The first three system conditions make sense to me as a scientist." The company views The Natural Step as a key piece of their sustainability agenda and expects it will have particular relevance in helping grow the business and reducing environmental impacts.

Although Air BP is widely regarded as having one of the best environmental records in the industry, the company understands that its operations still have negative ecological impacts. In August 1998, The Natural Step United Kingdom (TNS/UK) and Air BP formalized a partnership, just one month prior to a public announcement of BP's environmental commitment made at Yale University by Sir John Browne (BP Group Chief Executive). The Chief Executive

stated, "Our goal is to reduce our emissions of greenhouse gases by 10% from a 1990 baseline over the period to 2010." This is just one of the many public announcements Browne has made regarding BP's commitment to globally reducing CO² emissions and mitigating the effects of global warming and climate change.

The company is using The Natural Step to gain a comprehensive understanding of sustainable development and its relevance to the business objectives of Air BP. For the past two years, Air BP's senior staff members, Dr. Michael Nott, Global Health, Safety, and Environment Coordinator, and Dr. Ann Lamont, Global Human Resources Manager, have been working with Stephen Martin, Director of Learning for TNS/UK, to identify practical steps the company can take to move toward sustainable practices and enhance its competitive commercial position.

An initial, educational workshop on The Natural Step involving representatives from TNS, Air BP, BP Group, and British Airways clearly defined the scope of the partnership and identified the two main focuses of the work: operational issues and strategic issues.

The **Grassroots Program** was developed specifically to focus on operational issues relating to fuel supply, other airport procedures, and the reduction of fuel spillages. The goals of the program were to identify how Air BP's operations can become more sustainable, to recommend actions to achieve this, and to assess how TNS can help Air BP move toward sustainability.

In November 1998, the Grassroots Program began by educating a sample of airport supervisors, operators, and managers through a series of TNS workshops. The workshops introduced participants to The Natural Step and its



applications, and investigated the specific problem of fuel spillage.

TNS workshop participants gained a deeper understanding of BP Amoco and Air BP's environmental situation, linked environmental policy issues to operational issues through the emphasis on fuel spill reductions, and identified various outcomes related to individual learning and skills development. In addition, the following short-term action items were generated:

- 1) Initiate pilot programs to increase environmental awareness both for Air BP staff and for external partners and users, at trial airport locations in Sweden.
- 2) Review the use, recycling, and disposal of filters.
- 3) Quantify waste flowing from airport sites.
- 4) Document current good practices on recycling of waste materials.
- 5) Assess options for waste oil disposal.
- 6) Identify eco-friendly vehicle wash detergents.

Other issues raised during the Grassroots Program have wider policy implications, such as working with joint venture partners, collaborating with airlines, capitalizing on commercial opportunities, and finding ways to systematically build on opportunities provided by the workshops themselves. Based on a combination of feedback from workshop participants, the nature of the practical outcomes, and an assessment made by the TNS team, it is clear that the TNS principles and processes contributed substantially to the achievement of Air BP's initial goals for the workshops. According to Cox, "The Natural Step is an effective way of involving staff, making the concept of sustainability meaningful, enabling participants to identify short-term and long-term actions, and to develop the skills and motivation to implement them."

The second focus of the partnership, called the **Policy Review**, explored strategic issues related to sustainable development in the aviation industry and the implications of these for Air BP. The goal was to use The Natural Step principles to help Air BP generate a strategic vision and identify steps that would help move its business - and the aviation industry - towards sustainable development over the next 10 years.

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Again, the format for learning was a TNS workshop held this time in January 1999. The workshop addressed issues including the environment lobby on the aviation industry; the implications of environmental taxation; broad policy issues at the national and international level; BP's response to climate change, including specific targets and the pilot emissions trading system; aviation's role in the growth of world trade and changes in the structure of the industry; and the potential for Air BP to influence developments world-wide.

In considering where to begin implementing sustainability initiatives, aviation fuel was identified as the most important element. Environmental taxation was discussed as a stimulus, yet not a solution in itself. Other key sustainability components identified included fuel for ground operations, materials and energy for aircraft manufacture and maintenance, ground transportation, and the impacts of travel as linked to aviation. The group also recognized that cyclical rather than linear forms of energy use were essential in visioning sustainable solutions.



The workshop conclusions focused on the various reasons why the aviation industry can expect much greater environmental pressures over the next few years, as well as the industry forces impeding sustainable solutions. Priority actions that resulted were:

- 1) To establish effective collaboration with other major industry players, notably major airlines, aircraft and engine manufacturers, and joint partners. The workshop also identified several ways to initiate and develop this debate, and recognized




the value of TNS' objective framework and the shared language it provides.

- 2) To establish pilot initiatives towards sustainable development in areas within Air BP's control, such as ground operations.
- 3) To establish collaboration with other oil companies, and determine how Air BP should involve them in this process.

Already, Air BP is applying The Natural Step to airport operations in Sweden and Germany and is finding ways to switch to reusable oil filters, eco-friendly vehicle washing detergents, various recyclable products, and biofuels. In addition, the company is reducing fuel usage and beginning to educate its ground staff in the principles and applications of sustainability.

Having successfully completed the first phase of its work with Air BP, TNS/UK continues to assist the company with follow-up measures. They are co-creating a sustainability guide for airport staff, including refuelling operators, administrators, and support personnel. The guide will function as a training manual to be used at all Air BP airport locations, with the challenge of translating the principles and concepts of sustainability both linguistically and culturally. Currently, an interim guide is being tested at various European airports and a final product is expected in June 2000. TNS/UK is also working hard to train key Air BP staff and ultimately plans to cascade the training throughout the company. The broader focus is to begin looking at an overall strategy and policy for Air BP to implement sustainability worldwide.

According to TNS/UK, Air BP has a clear opportunity to raise motivation and support among its own and joint venture staff, and to improve the overall efficiency and sustainability of its operations. The Policy Review process is serving as an important step in harnessing board leadership and securing a commitment from Air BP's senior management. Before working with TNS, Air BP did not have a complete understanding of sustainable development issues at a strategic level nor did the company have a sustainable vision.

TNS/UK's Stephen Martin believes the company's sustainability agenda is as strong as ever yet questions how far it has actually permeated. He explains, "It hasn't gone too far, but it's beginning to build momentum within the organization. There are a number of steps still being taken in terms of internal communications to get the program really moving forward." 

¹ ICAO Annual Civil Aviation Report 1997

By Jill Rosenblum, Director of Development and Communications,
TNS/US

Information from this case summary was extracted from an Air BP Pathfinder Project Report produced by TNS United Kingdom.

