

## The Natural Step

The Natural Step (TNS) is an international framework for environmental sustainability first developed in Sweden in the late 1980s. Dr. Karl-Henrik Robert, its founder, noticed that many environmental discussions can be likened to a tree: most people focus on the leaves, such as how many parts per million of a toxic chemical are "safe," rather than on the roots and trunk and branches of the tree, such as the science-based principles we can all agree on. He and his colleagues identified four such principles that are essential environmental "system conditions" for the preservation of living systems -- and human society, business, and government systems -- on planet earth.

The four System Conditions can be described as follows. In order for society to be sustainable:

1. Nature's functions and diversity must not be systematically subject to increasing concentrations of substances extracted from the earth's crust;
2. Nature's functions and diversity must not be systematically subject to increasing concentrations of [persistent unnatural] substances produced by society;
3. Nature's functions and diversity must not be systematically impoverished by destructive forms of ecosystem manipulation; and
4. We must be efficient enough to ensure that basic human needs are met equitably.

The Natural Step therefore launched a national, and now international, campaign to develop and spread knowledge of these essential "system conditions," and apply them to planning and decision-making in all economic sectors.

Numerous domestic and international firms have adopted these basic principles to underlie their environmental planning and environmental management system development. Four successful TNS companies, Collins Pine (wood products), IKEA (furniture), Scandic Hotels (hospitality) and Interface, Inc. (industrial floor coverings) have been profiled in a recent book, *The Natural Step for Business*, by Brian Natrass and Mary Altomare. To order a copy, go to "Links and Resources" on our home page.

ETCI offers two levels of training in The Natural Step: an introductory overview and an in-depth application seminar using the client's situation as a case study.

- The *TNS Overview* is one-half day in length. It covers the basic science underlying the four system conditions, models of 21st century business development, and several case studies of successful TNS applications in a variety of industries.
- The *TNS Application Seminar* is up to two days in length, and is highly tailored for the client's situation. Because it includes the introductory material from the overview training, along with more detailed application materials and exercises, top managers can attend for the morning session only, then the implementation team can stay for the rest of the seminar to get the detailed information they need.

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