



Asian Productivity Organization “The APO in the News”

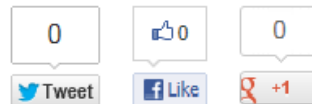
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Interview with Mr. Ryuichiro Yamazaki, Secretary-General of Asian Productivity Organization (APO)

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INTERVIEW BY ASIAGREENBUILDINGS.COM

Could you tell us about your organization and its role in organizing Eco-Products International Fair 2013?

The APO was established in 1961 as an intergovernmental organization with the mission of contributing to the socioeconomic development of the Asia Pacific region through productivity promotion. It currently has 20 member economies. The APO supports its members through capacity-building efforts such as training courses, workshops, seminars, and research to enhance productivity in the industry, service, and agriculture sectors.

After being inspired by the Rio de Janeiro Earth Summit in 1992, the APO developed the concept of Green Productivity, which aims to harmonize development with care for the environment. Realizing that countries in the Asia Pacific had numerous eco-products, eco-services, and eco-technologies to offer to help achieve that goal, in 2004 the first EPIF was held in Malaysia to spread awareness of them. That was followed by EPIFs in Thailand (2005), Singapore (2006), Vietnam (2008), the Philippines (2009), Indonesia (2010), India (2011), and again in Singapore this year. More than 700 exhibitors and 370,000 visitors have attended the series of fairs, which have expanded from simple exhibitions to include business matchmaking opportunities and networking. In conjunction with the fairs, the APO Eco-products Database and APO Eco-products Directory have been compiled; both are widely used as references inside and outside the region.

What have been the challenges in holding this event?

The APO always works with local partners when mounting the EPIFs, with the enthusiastic cooperation of the national productivity organization of the host member country. For example, the 2013 EPIF was organized in cooperation with the Waste Management & Recycling Association of Singapore (WMRAS) and SPRING Singapore. However, an international event of this size and scope with multiple stakeholders, and the parallel conference, would not be possible without the assistance of the Green Productivity Advisory Committee (GPAC). The GPAC was established in 2003 and now comprises some 65 high-level representatives of Japanese companies with excellent environmental track records. It has supported each EPIF and provides guidance on the APO's GP initiatives.

What are your mission and vision as an organization and how do you ensure that your operations are sustainable?

The mission of the APO is to contribute to the sustainable socioeconomic development of the Asia and the Pacific through enhancing productivity. Its vision is to be the leading international organization on productivity enhancement, enabling APO economies to be more productive and competitive by 2020. The APO now has three strategic directions: 1) strengthen NPOs and promote the development of SMEs and communities; 2) catalyze innovation-led productivity growth; 3) promote Green Productivity. These three strategic directions all point in the single direction of sustainability, in terms of upgrading human resources, continuing to do things better tomorrow than today, and taking care of our environment for present and future generations.

How do you think the Asian green market has developed over the past 10 years?

Green markets have developed at a tremendous pace in the past decade, especially in the Asia Pacific. They have been spurred by government green purchasing schemes, eco-labeling initiatives, exhibitions similar to the EPIFs, and increasing R&D by the private sector. All these efforts are showing the public that eco-products solutions accessible to all. We are also learning that traditional, low-tech solutions can be adapted to modern urban life, such as in green building design and materials. As just one concrete example of green market growth, the next host of the EPIF will be Taiwan. In 2011, the output value of the ROC's green trade exports was US\$ 42.8 billion, or 13.88% of its total exports. Those are impressive figures for any market.

In your opinion, what do you feel are the advantages that the Asian green market has over others?

One advantage is the traditional respect for nature and the desire to live in harmony with it. Another is the sheer geographic scale of Asia. The climates and crops, community structures, histories and cultures are truly diverse. The effects of ongoing climate change are manifesting here relatively early, encouraging innovative thinking to mitigate the changes. Still another advantage of Asian green market is its widespread use of information technology, meaning that their human resources are in touch with the world faster and more cost-effectively than ever before. This helps avoid duplication of efforts while creating synergy in attempt to resolve what are ultimately global problems.