

Better Regulation

2007/08 Progress Report



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MESSAGE FROM THE MINISTER



This third annual report of the Better Regulation Initiative demonstrates the government's on-going commitment to making it easier to do business, and highlights the progress made on our targets and priorities as we approach 2010.

Our continuing work on the Better Regulation's first target to cut the paperwork by 20% by 2010 is making an impact. In two years, the paperwork burden has been reduced by 8.3%. There is still more work to be done, but we are moving even closer to our target.

Over this past year the initiative has been gaining momentum. Departments across government are taking an even greater role in the implementation of our Better Regulation plan. The 2007/08 Government Business Plan committed all departments to meet a service standard of no more than 10 business days to process licences, permits and approvals by 2010. We are well on our way to that goal with 64% of our licences and permits currently being turned around in 10 days.

We have also put in place another strong pillar for Better Regulation – a Regulatory Management Policy based on globally recognized best practices. The use of regulatory management principles will change the culture of government to improve critical thinking before adopting regulatory solutions and alternatives. Departments have until the end of the fiscal year to implement the policy and determine the best application.

The province's Better Regulation Initiative is making its mark here at home and beyond. Staff have been invited to share Nova Scotia's approach and success with Better Regulation at national and international conferences. We have been invited to speak in Toronto and Victoria, and as far away as Germany and Australia.

I believe we now have the foundations of Nova Scotia's Better Regulation plan firmly in place and have positioned ourselves for success. Our focus will be on achieving more results from here to 2010.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Jamie Muir". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

The Honourable Jamie Muir
Chair of Treasury and Policy Board



MESSAGE FROM THE CHAIR OF THE STEERING COMMITTEE

It has been a pleasure to work with the Steering Committee and see the Better Regulation Initiative progress in its third year.

Over this past year, the Steering Committee has continued its dialogue with the business community, and has worked closely with departments to further advance our goal of changing government's culture of regulation.

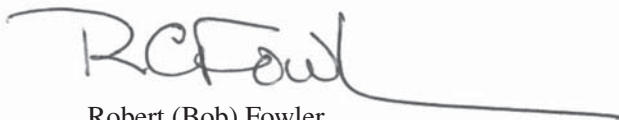
We have also reviewed our strategic objectives to ensure our focus is on improving the regulatory climate now and in to the future. We know we have the right priorities in place to truly improve regulation, but in the future we may seek more meaningful measures to reflect our work in helping businesses to comply with regulation.

Providing staff with the resources to help meet the objectives of the Better Regulation plan has been key. Hosting national and international experts has been one way to keep staff up-to-date on regulatory best practices and to learn from other jurisdictions.

Keynote speakers have included Colin Scott, a professor of European Union Regulation and Governance at the University College of Dublin. Gilles Rheaume of the Conference Board of Canada spoke at the Better Regulation Annual Spring Staff Update on the role of regulatory reform in sustainable prosperity. The annual Regulatory Craft Conference has also been a forum to learn from speakers like Malcolm Sparrow, an international expert on regulation and risk management from Harvard University.

In June, the Better Regulation office moved in with the Treasury and Policy Board. While having Better Regulation housed in a line department like Environment and Labour was a very effective way to gain credibility with other regulatory departments, we needed to move the initiative to a new level. Now that our corporate priorities are well established, it is necessary to house regulatory management in the central agency. With continued support from the Competitiveness and Compliance Initiative and Service Nova Scotia and Municipal Relations, the Better Regulation Initiative is in a position to make lasting change to how government approaches regulation.

My thanks go out to all the representatives on the Steering Committee for their on going support and a special thank-you to the Better Regulation Department Coordinators for their commitment in meeting the 2010 targets. They are all key in helping to make the Better Regulation Initiative a success.



Robert (Bob) Fowler
*Deputy Minister Treasury and Policy Board
Chair, Better Regulation Steering Committee*



INTRODUCTION

Over the past couple of years, the focus of the Better Regulation Initiative (BRI) has shifted from research and planning to action and change. What has not changed is the intent to keep the benefits and protection of regulation while making it easier to do business in Nova Scotia.

Three years in, the Better Regulation Initiative is making progress on its strategic objectives to:

- make it easier to do business,
- improve regulatory quality, and
- help business comply.

That means more effective protection for Nova Scotians, our communities and the environment.

This is a significant time for Better Regulation in Nova Scotia. The move to change the culture of regulation is gaining momentum and the targets for many of the initial improvements have a 2010 deadline – only two years away. In the past year, the continuing efforts to reduce paperwork have been balanced by an emphasis on two targets that will really help with the culture change:

- ensure applications for most licences and permits are turned around within 10 business days by 2010, and
- establish principles and a consistent approach to regulatory management across the government in 2008.

This report outlines the progress on those targets, as well as other priorities, and what they mean to business and other regulated organizations.

Did you know?

The Better Regulation Initiative was launched by the Government of Nova Scotia in the spring of 2005. The first target set was a 20% reduction in paperwork burden by 2010.

MAKING IT EASIER TO DO BUSINESS

The first of BRI's strategic objectives is about reducing the effort for business – both in time and cost – to comply with regulations. The significant administrative burden on business was a logical starting place, and the efforts in this area have grown.

The combined results for business and other clients will be:

- less time on paperwork,
- predictable wait times for government approvals, and
- forms that are easier to find, understand and complete.

Better Regulation began by tackling the paperwork burden. Then last year, we added service standards for approvals on licences and permits. Now a benchmark has been set and an interim measure taken to assess progress on service standards. Service Nova Scotia and Municipal Relations has played a pivotal role in these areas, with its online services to business and the high percentage of provincial licences and permits it administers.

In the upcoming year, more time will be spent on improving forms – the *bread and butter* of paperwork and a significant contributor to the administrative burden. The Competitiveness and Compliance Initiative got the ball rolling with a pilot project that is providing the basis for improvements. Not only will the changes make it easier for business, they will make it easier for government employees as well.

Did you know?

The Canadian Federation of Independent Business (CFIB) was so pleased the Government of Nova Scotia is tackling regulatory paperwork that the association recognized the government with an award during Small Business Week in October 2007.

Paperwork reduced by 8.3%

The Government of Nova Scotia has reduced the paperwork burden on business by 8.3% in two years. That's the equivalent of almost \$1.2 million in savings in the past year alone. Two years remain to reach BRI's target of a 20% reduction in paperwork by 2010.

From April 2007 to March 2008, the Better Regulation Index estimates that Nova Scotia business spent about 564,000 hours on the regulatory paperwork required by provincial departments, a drop of more than 51,000 hours in two years.

The results show increased momentum, with a reduction of 5.8% last year and 2.5% the previous year.

"Wrestling the red tape beast is no easy feat. But, the government of Nova Scotia has shown a real commitment to do just that through ongoing measurement and accountability," said Leanne Hachey, vice-president, Atlantic, CFIB.

Paperwork was the first priority of the Better Regulation Initiative, and it remains at the top of the list. The reasons are simple:

- Cutting paperwork is an effective way to make it easier for business, without losing the protection of regulation.
- Business told us paperwork takes a lot of effort, and reducing it saves time and frustration.

Here are a few examples of changes in the past year:

- Businesses with a liquor licence are no longer required to file reports documenting food and beverage sales, nor do they have to apply for permission to have live entertainment on the premises.
- The Land Registry system has eliminated certain information requirements and moved to an online registration process, which saves significant time.
- Employers working in the offshore oil and gas industry no longer have to apply to have employees work more than six days in a row. The Canada-Nova Scotia Offshore Petroleum Board continues to oversee employee protection.

Did you know?

The Better Regulation Index is the first inventory of regulatory paperwork in Nova Scotia and estimates the combined time it takes businesses to complete paperwork for all provincial government departments. The Index is calculated each year by taking the number of transactions and multiplying it by the average transaction time for that year.

MAKING IT EASIER TO DO BUSINESS

64% of licences and permits meet 10-day turn-around

In 2007-08, 64% of provincial licences and permits met the 10-day turn-around standard, exceeding the interim target of 50% by 2008. Business will benefit from this promising start and reliable service standards.

“Businesses don’t mind risk, but they hate uncertainty,” said Paul Taylor, deputy minister of Economic Development. “Setting service standards will go a long way to improve the predictability of government processes for business, allowing them to use their time more efficiently.”

Business can count on service standards

Protecting citizens, communities and the environment is still crucial, so certain licences and permits will have service standards longer than 10 days.

Those standards have to be approved by Cabinet and have to be publicized so business can count on a predictable process and timeframe. In total, departments have requested other service standards for 21% of all licences and permits. Combined, they represent less than one percent of the 2 million applications submitted last year.

Another service standard is only an option if at least one of the following circumstances applies to the licence or permit:

- It requires considerable analysis, where a turn-around of 10 days or fewer would be detrimental to public interest/safety.
 - For example, alteration of a watercourse such as a dam
- Documents are required from outside the provincial government, but only the government can request them.
 - For example, aquaculture licence
- Consultation is required and it would extend the turn-around time beyond 10 business days.
 - For example, environmental assessment

Did you know?

In 2007-08, the provincial government had 511 licences and permits on the books. Fifty-five of those had no transactions that fiscal year because they were new or apply to occasional events, such as offshore exploration. If you remove those with no transactions, 71% of all licences and permits met the 10-day turn-around standard.

- It needs Cabinet approval. (This applies to only 6% of licences and permits being considered for other service standards.)
 - For example, designation of a provincial heritage property

Success defined

For a licence or permit to meet its service standard in a given year, employees have to process 90% of the applications within the allotted number of business days. Departments begin counting the days when they receive a completed application, and the clock stops when they send a response.

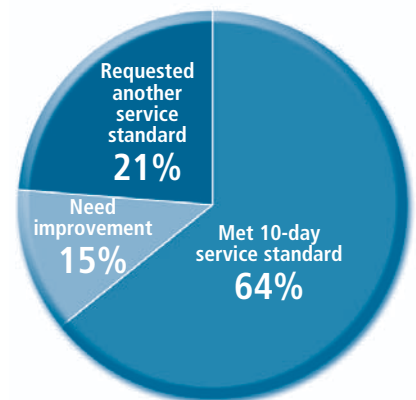
To help government employees examine their processes and find ways to streamline them, Better Regulation offered a two-day course on process mapping in early 2008. Forty people representing all departments with significant regulatory responsibilities participated in two sessions.

In the upcoming year, departments will:

- set their remaining service standards (and have them approved),
- communicate them to business, and
- measure against those standards.

They'll also keep measuring those with the 10-day turn-around time.

The results for licences and permits in 2007/08



Easing the way for companies

Recent changes to the Companies Act make it easier and quicker for businesses to incorporate, amalgamate or convert to an unlimited company.

The process for corporate structure and governance has been streamlined by allowing companies to submit changes to the Registrar of Joint Stock Companies, rather than requiring them to go before a judge.

Companies wishing to make fundamental changes – to the company's name, to its share structure or by merging with another company – can now do so with one shareholder meeting. The special resolution still has to be supported by three-quarters of shareholders (two-thirds if the company was incorporated after June 1, 2008). The second "confirmatory" meeting is no longer required.

These changes to modernize internal corporate transactions will save a significant amount of paperwork. They also maintain Nova Scotia's competitive advantage in attracting companies that wish to continue using unlimited liability status. Involvement by the Nova Scotia Barristers' Society was vital to this work. In fact, the Society provides ongoing input on issues and legislation through a joint committee.

MAKING IT EASIER TO DO BUSINESS

Since service standards are an ongoing commitment, measurement and reporting don't stop there. Each year, departments will measure all licences and permits against their service standards and monitor their year-over-year results. This approach will ensure business can count on a timely and predictable process.

Forms to be improved

Imagine if:

- all the forms business needed were easy to find and understand,
- the basic information was always requested in the same way and the same order, and
- submitting the form was as simple as pressing a button.

Seem far-fetched? Government employees working on Better Regulation don't think so. Although it may take some time to achieve all of those things, simple improvements are starting now. BRI is taking on forms next, creating standards and guidelines to help departments improve their forms and make forms more consistent across the provincial government.

Review finds purpose and variety

The Competitiveness and Compliance Initiative (CCI) conducted a review and assessment of the forms at the former Department of Environment and Labour in 2008. The result was a case study of the confusion business encounters with provincial government forms – a wide variety of wording, questions, labelling, appearance and formats.

Did you know?

Many forms are actually part of specific regulations. That means any changes have to be approved at Cabinet. Work is being done to remove specific forms from regulation, wherever possible. That will make it easier to improve them, combine them or get rid of unnecessary forms.

“The review found that forms add to the paperwork burden of clients and staff,” said Chris Daly, director of Policy, Department of Environment. “However, they’re also an important tool to help government satisfy its obligations to business, citizens and the environment.”

That’s when BRI decided business would benefit from standards and guidelines to create more consistency and simplicity across the provincial government.

The standards will aim to address the issues by:

- creating consistent design elements,
- setting out a logical, consistent order for questions,
- incorporating plain language, and
- recommending consistent phrasing of questions.

BRI has started the work and plans to have the standards and guidelines provided to all departments for their reference in the fall of 2008, with support from Communications Nova Scotia on forms design and plain language.



Saving time for day cares

The Child Abuse Register search process has been streamlined, saving time for Nova Scotia’s 300 day cares and other organizations while maintaining protection for children.

There are essentially two changes:

- day cares and volunteer organizations no longer have to request searches on behalf of potential employees or volunteers, since they can apply directly; and
- several steps have been removed from the application process, reducing the average time for applicants from approximately two hours to just a few minutes.

The new process also reduces the number of search requests, because applicants can share the results of one search with multiple organizations, rather than completing a separate search for each organization. With more than 20,000 requests for Child Abuse Register checks each year, the time savings could be substantial.

The changes are especially helpful for those who work with multiple organizations, including volunteers and substitute teachers.

IMPROVING REGULATORY QUALITY

While the initial focus on decreasing the administrative burden has been instrumental in getting BRI moving, it's just the beginning. The real challenge is to improve the quality of regulation for the long-term.

It's a challenge the government is addressing. Recognizing it will take time to create a culture of continuous improvement, BRI is setting the foundation for the future. Part of that foundation is a new policy on regulatory management. The policy will help establish a new way of regulating that mitigates the impact on the marketplace and maximizes the benefits to citizens.

Ultimately, the policy will lead to regulation that:

- makes sense,
- is focussed on the outcome,
- is effective, and
- benefits society more than it impacts business.

Improving the quality of regulation also depends on making the best use of the knowledge and skills within the government. To address that, BRI continues to create and support opportunities to share knowledge and increase the capacity of employees to manage regulation efficiently and effectively.

In the past year, Better Regulation began rolling out the Regulatory Management Policy, its guiding principles and new training across the provincial government. Together, all of this work will result in:

- a more consistent approach to regulatory management across the government,
- regulating only when it's necessary and effective, and
- enhanced knowledge and skill in managing regulation.

Did you know?

The Conference Board of Canada says the main factors of provincial regulation that affect competitiveness are:

- excessive, unclear, inflexible regulations, and
- inconsistent regulations across provinces, territories and other countries.

Policy and principles rolled out

The Regulatory Management Policy and guiding principles that will help change the way government employees regulate were rolled out in May and June 2008. They'll do more than improve the quality of regulation. The policy and principles will also help government employees achieve clearer processes and better use of resources.

"The Government of Nova Scotia is committed to regulating in a way that contributes to a prosperous business climate and ensures that citizens, communities and the environment are well protected." (excerpt from the Policy Statement)

The essence of the policy is in line with what business has asked for and requires government to:

- consider carefully when to intervene,
- do it only when the benefits justify the costs,
- leave a light footprint when it does get involved, and
- ensure the benefits and protection of regulation are maintained or improved.

"Regulations hinder business, especially small business, entrepreneurs and innovation, as well as social responsibilities," Wayne Polem, owner of Executive Rentals said. "Government's role is to do for the people what the people cannot do for themselves!"

Departments are expected to implement the policy by March 31, 2009. The departments of Environment, Labour and Workforce Development, and Energy already have processes in place to ensure consistency with the policy. Other departments are working on implementation.

Did you know?

To help government employees implement the policy and to model the benefits of plain language use, BRI developed a plain language guide to the policy. It's just one of the ways BRI is walking the talk in the implementation of the policy and principles.

IMPROVING REGULATORY QUALITY

Principles provide guidance

The Regulatory Management Principles are in line with best practices being applied in other countries and were adapted from principles endorsed by a Canada-wide group of government specialists on regulatory reform. The principles provide guidance for every step of the regulatory management process and address many of the concerns we've heard from business.

While the result of BRI overall is simpler, more effective regulation, in specific situations that may mean no regulation. That's why the principles start by ensuring the process to consider an issue is effective. They begin with:

1. Clearly define the problem – different problems call for different solutions, which may also be affected by the scope and context of the problem.
2. Demonstrate regulation is warranted and required – the steps to come depend on considering the risks of acting or not acting from the outset. If action is appropriate, then the most effective and efficient options will be reviewed, including alternatives to regulation.

If it's determined that government action is likely necessary, the development of regulation includes consulting with and considering business and other stakeholders. The principles ask government employees to:

3. Provide transparency in development and implementation – that means consulting with those affected and understanding possible implementation concerns so they can be mitigated.
4. Assess the costs and benefits, including implementation – this is in the broadest sense of costs and benefits to society, the environment and the economy, as well as making sure the chosen option(s) are feasible and cost-effective.
5. Minimize the impact on a fair and competitive market – the chosen regulatory tool(s) should provide the greatest public benefit and impose a reasonable burden on business.
6. Eliminate duplicate requirements – especially with new regulatory tools, it helps to look at any similar programs to make sure there's no duplication, right down to the specific paperwork. This can include reviewing what happens in other levels of government or other provinces to make sure regulations are harmonized.

Did you know?

While the number of principles for better regulation or regulatory reform varies from place to place – six in Ireland, five in the United Kingdom, 10 for the Canada-wide group, nine in Nova Scotia – the content is much the same. It's about making regulation effective and efficient well into the future.

7. Focus on outcomes and objectives – what regulated organizations achieve is usually more important than how they achieve it. The emphasis is on whatever is most likely to be effective in changing behaviours.

The ultimate success of a regulation is determined in the critical stage of implementation. Implementation needs to facilitate compliance and be as efficient as possible for all those affected, business included. The expectations are:

8. Ensure regulations are easily understood, accessible and enforceable – regulated organizations have to know about them and understand them to comply.
9. Review regulations for effectiveness and efficiency – a quick look at the old laws in any jurisdiction make it readily apparent: a regulation that's perfectly appropriate at the time can be extremely outdated years later.

The policy and principles will be reviewed by Treasury and Policy Board at the end of the first year. The point is to make sure they're effective and meet the objective of improving the quality of regulation. That review will consider input from departments on the impact the policy is having on their stakeholders, as well as direct feedback from stakeholders themselves.



Bringing harmony to regulation

Different rules in different provinces can cause confusion, frustration and extra work for business. That's why Nova Scotia is working with other governments to harmonize regulations when it makes sense – both provincially and federally.

We are working with our closest neighbor, New Brunswick, to harmonize:

- onshore petroleum and marine renewable energy legislation and regulations, and
- criteria for licensing for the private security industry.

A little further afield:

- We are working with the other Atlantic Provinces to develop uniform conditions for special move permits for over-sized loads.
- We are working on harmonizing insurance regulations in the Maritime Provinces, starting with a model act to be completed in 2008 (does not include auto insurance).
- Work on harmonizing securities regulations continues with the new national rule for prospectus requirements. This reduces costs and makes it easier for reporting issuers to distribute securities across Canada while maintaining a high level of disclosure to investors.

The reintroduction of the Offshore Job Safety Act in Nova Scotia ensures we have the same rules as Newfoundland and Labrador and the federal government, reducing the administrative burden and improving competition and compliance.

IMPROVING REGULATORY QUALITY

Training offered on managing regulation

Better Regulation is helping government employees put the new policy and principles into action by offering training on managing regulation. At a minimum, they can attend a short awareness session. Those more involved in programs and policy are encouraged to participate in training modules on regulatory management.

It's not enough to create – or even communicate – a new policy. As with any new regulation, the regulator has a responsibility to ensure those affected are aware and understand what it means to them. That's why the policy is supported by training and a plain language guide with more information on implementing it. They help equip government employees to implement the policy and principles.

By the end of June 2008, 250 government employees had attended the awareness sessions, where they received the policy and guide and were informed of additional resources available on the government intranet site.

CCI has developed three one-day workshops on regulatory management: problem definition, performance measurement and instrument selection. The training was offered for the first time in April and by the end of June, 25 government employees had participated in the workshops, with 50 more signed up for future sessions.

“The training was informative and practical,” said one participant. “I hadn’t realized there were so many things to consider. I’ll use what I learned to make sure regulation is reasonable – for business, citizens and government employees!”

The workshop on consultation will be ready in the fall of 2008, and a module on impact assessment is expected to be added later.

Did you know?

BRI is taking capacity building for the future to a new level. Those working on Better Regulation have been sharing information with potential employees, like the students of the Masters in Public Administration program at Dalhousie University. They've made presentations in the classroom and hired interns to work on BRI projects.

Sharing knowledge increases capacity

The sharing of knowledge – within the province, with other governments and with business – is contributing to BRI's successes.

Regular meetings with business and industry associations and leaders continue to provide much needed insight and guidance. The three times yearly meetings with business leaders have included:

- Canadian Payroll Association
- Nova Scotia Association of Regional Development Authorities
- Canadian Federation of Independent Business
- Canadian Restaurant and Food Service Association
- Canadian Manufacturers & Exporters
- Construction Association of Nova Scotia
- Halifax Chamber of Commerce
- Greater Halifax Partnership

At the February meeting, the minister responsible for BRI joined in to hear their concerns first-hand.

In addition, business representatives also joined government employees for the second annual Better Regulation update in June 2008 and the second annual Regulatory Craft conference in October 2007.



Protecting your title

In 2005, the new Land Registry system was implemented – the first significant change to how we register property in Nova Scotia in 250 years. Since we reported on it in 2006, the province has made further improvements to streamline the process and save time.

Overall, the paperwork to convert a property into the new system originally took an average of 230 minutes. By the end of March 2007, the same transaction took only 100 minutes, saving lawyers' time and making buying, selling and refinancing easier and faster for all Nova Scotians.

The new online submission of documents such as deeds and mortgages is saving time and trees. The amount of paper submitted has decreased by more than 80%. Electronic filing is really catching on too. By the end of June 2008, 76% of all documents were being submitted electronically, more than double the previous year.

Besides the time and cost savings, Nova Scotia land owners benefit from:

- improved fraud prevention for their land title, and
- the ability to resolve title disputes with the Registrar General, rather than having to go to the Supreme Court.

IMPROVING REGULATORY QUALITY

In keeping with the session's theme of *Looking Through a Business Lens*, participants at the half-day BRI update tried BizPaL. That's the online tool that provides a list of business licence and permit requirements from all three levels of government: municipal, provincial and federal. It was an eye-opening experience for the government employees involved.

To bring even more perspective, Leanne Hachey of the Canadian Federation of Independent Business and Brad Smith of the Greater Halifax Partnership shared stories of specific challenges faced by different businesses.

The 2007 Regulatory Craft Conference provided a great opportunity for government employees to share best regulatory practices and centred on the strategic objectives for Better Regulation. It was open to business attendees to help keep them informed and provide a chance to join in discussions.

CCI hosted the event, which featured two keynote speakers:

- Malcolm Sparrow, an author and professor from the John F. Kennedy School of Government at Harvard, talked about the need to pick apart complex problems and understand the components to solve them.
- Doug MacKenzie-Mohr, an author and founder of community-based social marketing, talked about the need for government to re-think how it influences the public.

Presenters from the provincial government, other provinces and other countries shared innovations in regulatory reform during the two-day conference. CCI is currently planning the third annual Regulatory Craft Conference, to be held in fall 2008.

This focus on sharing knowledge and building capacity for regulatory reform will continue as BRI goes forward. Similar to any knowledge or service-based company, the provincial government relies on its people and their capabilities to make the organization and regulation successful.

Did you know?

Nova Scotia businesses appear to be less concerned about regulation and paperwork than they were when BRI first began. According to the Canadian Federation of Independent Business, the number of members who rank "government regulation and paperwork" as their top issue has decreased since 2006:

2006 – 77.2% (n = 1199)

2007 – 72% (n = 1056)

2008 (January to June) – 62% (n = 869)

Source: CFIB's "Our Members' Opinion" Survey 2006 – 2008

HELPING BUSINESS COMPLY

While the focus for the past year has been on making it easier and improving regulatory quality, progress has continued on helping business comply. This can have a bottom-line impact too, since non-compliance can lead to fines and extra work for business.

Most of the efforts in this area over the past year have been led by individual departments making incremental improvements.

CCI promotes best compliance practices

In keeping with its mandate, the Competitiveness and Compliance Initiative (CCI) has developed a guidance document on best practices for compliance. It covers planning, developing and delivering compliance assistance to regulated organizations. To help government employees put the best compliance practices in place, it offers information on:

- identifying and analysing affected organizations and business,
- choosing and developing effective tools to assist business in complying,
- writing in plain language, and
- delivering regulatory messages efficiently.

The draft document has been shared with potential users in the Department of Labour and Workforce Development to get their input before it's finalized. Then the document will be used as the basis for training in 2008-09. BRI will be looking at the tool and training to determine how it should be offered to other government departments.

Did you know?

Regulations that are consistently enforced not only better protect citizens, our communities and the environment. They create a level playing field for all businesses to compete more fairly.

HELPING BUSINESS COMPLY

BizPaL available to 45% of businesses

BizPaL is now available to approximately 45% of businesses in Nova Scotia, with partnerships established with the Halifax Regional Municipality, New Glasgow and Westville. The free, online tool provides entrepreneurs with access to a customized list of licences and permits required by the municipal, provincial and federal governments to operate a business.

In line with BRI's objectives, BizPaL helps business comply by making it easier to find out what regulatory requirements apply to them. By including all three levels of government, the implementation of this tool moves beyond the current provincial focus of Better Regulation and supports the intent to work with other governments, where possible, to make it easier for business.

A plan is in place to partner with other interested municipalities. The province is offering considerable assistance to municipalities who participate, further expanding the availability of BizPaL.

Plain language use growing

The concept has been around for a long time now. It's deceptively simple, but can make a big difference. The plain language approach to writing helps readers understand what you mean – whether you're a business talking to customers or a government talking to business.

Plain language can save the public, and government employees, time and frustration by reducing errors. It also can increase compliance, since business knows what it needs to do. Plain language:

- focuses on the audience,
- is well-organized, and
- is clear and to the point.

Stepping into the shoes of affected business helps government employees communicate clearly and effectively. By approaching writing with plain language in mind, government employees:

- select information that meets business needs, not just their purpose;
- organize information according to what's relevant to the business audience;
- write simply and clearly – more like they talk, staying away from complicated language; and
- use common language, explain jargon and get rid of unnecessary information and words.

Even the layout of the document may be different to make things easier to skim and read.

Here are several examples of how departments are using plain language:

- The Competitiveness and Compliance Initiative has developed a plain language guide for employees in the departments of Labour and Workforce Development, and Environment. It's being applied to the new Construction Industry Portal.
- The Department of Energy has developed many plain language materials, including fact sheets for the public and education activity booklets for children.
- Service Nova Scotia and Municipal Relations aims to have plain language guides for new regulations and applies plain language to the department's website.
- The Department of Justice is modernizing regulations and ensuring they're as clear as possible.

Yet it's not always easy to apply plain language, especially for experts on a topic. To gain the business perspective, government consults with industry representatives and departments are testing materials with users more often.



Talking saves time

The Department of Energy's simple solution for regulation of onshore oil and gas activities is proof that talking can be more efficient than paperwork!

Because the activities involved are so diverse – from worker and public safety to environmental protection – they're regulated by many different departments. So, Energy uses One-Window Standing Committees to bring the relevant departments together with company representatives. This includes as many as five provincial departments and, when appropriate, federal regulators.

The oil or gas company explains the proposed activity and the government representatives provide feedback and direction. The committee is coordinated and chaired by an administrator who is appointed to regulate each onshore activity on behalf of the Minister of Energy. The administrator also approves each activity, monitors it and signs off to make sure the company complies with all legislation.

"We respect the direct and open communication with the Nova Scotia government," said Mark Gustafson, Chairman and CEO of Triangle Petroleum Corporation. "It's a process that ensures responsible development of onshore oil and gas resources and timely support for business."

This unique approach:

- reduces processing time,
- encourages better communication between the regulators and companies,
- decreases the administrative burden on both government and industry, and
- assists with compliance.

CONCLUSION

It's been another big year for the Better Regulation Initiative. We've made further progress toward our targets and taken some significant new steps:

- setting service standards for licences and permits, and
- developing and rolling out a new approach to regulatory management.

The focus in the upcoming year will be to ensure these new ideas become ingrained in our culture – no small task. We will keep our focus on action and change, building on the planning and research that's been done.

Measurement and reporting also continue to be important, both as a means to communicate what Better Regulation is doing and as a way to keep us on track.



Rolling, rolling – efficiently

Quality regulation allows businesses to do their jobs cost-effectively. One example is new rules that allow provincial truckers to use a wide-based tire. These tires are designed to replace the traditional dual tires and increase fuel economy by up to 8%. The benefits to business and the environment don't stop at fuel either. Using the new tires means fewer rims and less weight from tires for the 17,000 truckers who travel our roads.

"Next-generation, wide-based tires are celebrated for their efficiency and safety," said Peter Nelson, executive director of the Atlantic Provinces Trucking Association, "We wish to thank the government of Nova Scotia for its work on this initiative, which is good for industry and good for the environment."

Nova Scotians benefit from improved safety on the highway and economic spin-offs, since these tires are manufactured in the province. The new weight limit for the wide-based tires and road restrictions take into account concerns about safety and road wear, as well as the needs of the trucking industry. Other provinces and territories are also considering this change.

Progress has been made

In keeping with our reporting objective, we've summarized the progress toward our targets so far. The bottom line: three years into the initial five-year mandate for Better Regulation, we're ahead on some targets and have considerable work to do on others. Overall, we're roughly where we hoped to be, with much work still ahead of us.

Target: Reduce the paperwork burden by 20% by 2010, as measured by the Better Regulation Index

Progress: In two years the paperwork burden was reduced by 8.3%.

Target: Ensure applications for most licenses and permits are turned around within 10 business days by 2010; interim target of 50% by 2008

Progress: 64% of licences and permits met the service standard of 10 days in the past year. Those which need different standards for protection purposes have been identified. They have to seek approval for their standards and monitor results as well.

Target: Establish principles and a consistent approach to regulatory management across the government in 2008

Progress: A new Regulatory Management Policy and principles have been rolled out and training is underway to help employees implement them. The departments of Labour and Workforce Development, Energy, and Environment have processes in place consistent with the policy. At Labour and Workforce Development and Environment, 72% of their regulatory proposals in the past year were in line with the policy.

Target: Provide single-point access to government requirements for 80% of Nova Scotia municipalities and 80% of industry sectors through BizPaL by 2009

Progress: Halifax Regional Municipality, New Glasgow and Westville have implemented BizPaL with the province, covering almost 45% of businesses in Nova Scotia. The uptake for municipalities is slower than we had hoped, but a plan is in place to help more of them implement this tool.

CONCLUSION

Target: Ensure 80% of regulatory programs have compliance assistance plans in place by 2010

Progress: A guidance document has been developed by CCI and will be used to offer training in the upcoming year in Environment, and Labour and Workforce Development, where many of the province's regulations reside. BRI will be determining how to share this across government. In addition, this target is being reviewed to ensure we're measuring something meaningful and it may be revised.

Target: Provide consistent training on inspection and investigation skills for all inspectors by 2010

Progress: CCI developed foundation training with the Nova Scotia Community College in 2006. So far, training has been offered in the following departments: Service Nova Scotia and Municipal Relations, Agriculture, Justice, Environment, and Labour and Workforce Development.

Nova Scotia's Better Regulation Initiative is recognized Canada-wide as a comprehensive approach with the right elements. Even so, the best approach is only effective when it's followed up with action. In the next year, we are determined to make even more progress in changing the culture of regulation in the provincial government, and the way we regulate.

With the plans we have in place and a broad commitment to the success of BRI, we're confident we'll meet our targets.

If you'd like to offer any comments on regulation – where you see improvement or where improvement is needed – there's a feedback box on the home page of our website at www.gov.ns.ca/betterregulation.


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