

## **CDM Podcasts: Environmental Insights for Industry A Conversation with Tom Pedersen**

**Hunter:** Hello. This is Hunter Nolen, president of CDM's Industrial Services Group and host of our podcasts series Environmental Insights for Industry. Each month we talk with specialists about environmental and infrastructure trends, challenges, and opportunities facing today's business and industry. Topics include water management and treatment technologies, environmental program management, air quality and greenhouse gases, and remediation solutions for contaminated properties. We focus on high-value, sustainable, and integrated solutions that enhance environmental stewardship, social responsibility, and business success.

Our topic today is industry and sustainability. Our guest is Tom Pedersen. Tom is a senior vice president and management consultant at CDM, and is the firm's director of sustainability. He has 29 years of environmental consulting experience with particular expertise in environmental health, safety, quality, and sustainability management systems. Tom's a trained quality management system and environmental management system lead auditor and he is experienced in the performance of gap analysis and management system audits. Tom joins us from our Cambridge, Massachusetts office.

**Tom:** Hello, Hunter. Glad to join you.

**Hunter:** Tom, first can you define sustainability in terms that our industrial clients and consumers can understand?

**Tom:** Hunter, sustainability is a term that is often difficult to define, but it is commonly understood as activities that meet the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their needs. Now that definition often doesn't get us to the point where we can actually operationalize it, and so we look at sustainability from three integrated dimensions: the environmental, economic, and social dimensions. But beyond that sustainability is about improving the quality of life. And when we look at the quality of life issues those really are related to the communities in which we live and work, as well as the workplace that our companies and our clients are dealing with.

**Hunter:** A great deal of emphasis is currently being placed on sustainability both in the public sector and in the private sectors. What do you think contributes the most to this increased attention being given to this topic?

**Tom:** Every day we read in the newspaper, and we hear on the radio, we see on the internet information that is coming at us related to the energy crisis, economy, and environmental issues. All of those issues focus on sustainability. And these discussions are taking place within our industries because we need to find ways to address the challenges posed by these issues as well as look at ways to address the opportunities that these issues pose to us.

**Hunter:** Well now you've mentioned challenges and opportunities. What do you see in this regard?

**Tom:** When we look at sustainability from the perspective of the triple bottom line we look at the environmental issue, the social issues, as well as the economic issues. And the challenges that we face may be in a specific area of expertise, but how we address those in a holistic and interdependent and interrelated matter is the probably the most significant challenge. We know that we're going to be able to address the technical challenges associated with water supply, with regard to energy, but how we do that in an interdependent matter to maximize benefit for all is probably the most significant challenge that sustainability poses to us. We also see that those organizations that are able to engage their employees in addressing sustainability are the ones that can meet the challenge in a systematic manner and gives their employees a sense of contributing to solutions.

**Hunter:** Tom it also seems that sustainability aligns very very closely with environmental safety and health issues. How do the managers of environmental safety and health related activities apply sustainability in what they're doing for their companies?

**Tom:** We see in organizations sustainability being discussed at all levels and often those discussions take place in different groups within organizations. The issue of sustainability is discussed from the stand point of public relations, it's discussed from the stand point of corporate risk assessment, and we know that EHS managers have embedded systematic approaches to addressing environmental issues. Sustainability has a large component that addresses the issues of the environment but beyond that, the social and economic issues are also

important to address, and we know that EHS managers are also equipped to address the social and economic issues.

**Hunter:** Energy efficiency is becoming more important to industrial corporations because it directly translates to the bottom line, but it also seems to be very important in improvement of sustainability. This creates a need for there to be much coordination between different groups within an industrial corporation – energy management department, infrastructure, operational productivity groups, environmental health and safety departments, etc. How do you see energy efficiency influencing how sustainability is being managed over time and the evolution of that process?

**Tom:** Well Hunter that's a very interesting question and it is one that industry is facing on a regular basis now because of the energy crisis. The issues of energy are not just the responsibility of one department, but every individual on the plant floor as well as those in the corporate offices. Addressing those issues that go across multiple departments really does require a different approach. It requires bringing together those individuals that have an understanding of the issues as well as those individuals that may not have thought about energy but may have some role in helping to address this. So we see that pulling together a group of individuals within an organization to address the energy issue allows for solutions to be developed that perhaps were not evident on the surface. Again it's an approach that involves individuals in an interdependent and interdisciplinary manner that really draws on the expertise that resides throughout these organizations.

**Hunter:** Greenhouse gas concerns are becoming important in the industrial community as well have been important for some time. Those issues are commonly associated with sustainability. How do you see the connection there and how companies might combine their efforts in those regards?

**Tom:** The discussion regarding climate change has reached the board rooms of industry leaders and they understand that this issue is something that they must address. It's directly connected with the crisis associated with energy, and industrial leaders need to find the ways to address the energy crisis and greenhouse gas emissions as part of that. Greenhouse gas and the climate change issue are part of the sustainability, but again addressing it in a holistic manner that looks

at how an organization or corporation can benefit society by addressing these issues is the most important part of a sustainability approach to these challenges.

**Hunter:** What initial steps would you suggest to corporations who are just beginning their sustainability programs?

**Tom:** One of the things we see as an initial step is taking in account of all the activities that an organization is currently is involved in that relate to sustainability. Many of our industry clients are quite advanced when it comes to environmental performance and they have a good track record of that excellent data, but we also know that many of those organizations also do things with regard to internal recycling, methods to engage the community, and often those activities are not recorded mainly because they weren't required to be reported through regulatory programs or existing organizational reporting structures. That initial activity of just determining baseline conditions provides a very good starting point. It engages individuals within the organization around sustainability, they begin to understand all of the things that they have been doing and the benefits that have been derived from them. That then feeds in to a continuum improvement cycle that allows the organization to track performance, monitor that performance, and report on that performance in a meaningful way that funnels activities toward maximum benefit from a sustainability standpoint.

**Hunter:** As we go forward, sustainability no doubt will develop in many different ways. It seems to be rather young science and rather young concept in its current definition. Tom, how do you see sustainability evolving into the future?

**Tom:** Hunter, sustainability is an issue that is on the minds of individuals around the world. And we see that the future is going to really present lots of challenges as well as opportunities. We see the landscape changing even today. We see renewable energy being built into new projects and we also see interest in providing for social benefits through projects that our clients undertake. We also see that universities have recognized the issue of sustainability as an important issue for today and the future. And universities are now offering degree programs bachelor's, master's, Ph.D.s, and MBAs in sustainability. So we know that the future will include individuals that have had more formal training in the science and art of sustainability,

which is an interdependent interrelated holistic view of our environment, the society in which we live, and work and the economies in which we all live.

**Hunter:** Tom, thanks for joining us today. This has been a fascinating discussion.

**Tom:** Well, thank you, Hunter. It has been my pleasure.

**Hunter:** And to our listeners, thank you. Please join us for CDM's next episode Environmental Insights for Industry.