Association of State and Territorial Solid Waste Management Officials
2001 Strategic Plan

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ASTSWMO’s Mission:
“To enhance and promote effective state and territorial waste management programs, and affect national waste management policies.”

I. Introduction

The Association of State and Territorial Solid Waste Management Officials (ASTSWMO) was incorporated in 1974 to serve the needs of waste program managers and staff in environmental agencies in the states and trust territories. ASTSWMO focuses on the needs of state and territorial hazardous waste programs; non-hazardous municipal solid waste and industrial waste programs; recycling, waste minimization, and reduction programs; Superfund and state cleanup programs; waste management and cleanup activities at federal facilities; and underground storage tank and leaking underground storage tank programs.

This document, the 2001 Strategic Plan, sets out ASTSWMO’s vision for its strategic directions for the year 2001 and beyond.

II. 2001 Strategic Directions – Reaffirming ASTSWMO’s Mission

The 1995/1998 ASTSWMO strategic plan set out eight strategic directions: national policy development; program development and support and sharing program information; resources; technical assistance; marketing; culture change; good science; and environmental indicators. The 2001 Strategic Plan narrows these eight strategic directions to two: program development and support for states and territories and to influence national waste program policy decisions. These two strategic directions are the fundamental elements of ASTSWMO’s mission, which is the organizing principle for all of ASTSWMO’s work. Narrowing its strategic focus from eight to two directions recognizes that ASTSWMO’s work on more specific issues – whether consideration of specific policy initiatives or providing training or technical assistance – must, fundamentally, be responsive to and supportive of the specific needs of state and territorial solid waste and cleanup programs or must contribute to development of sound national waste program policy decisions.

III. Strategic Direction #1: Program Development and Support

Providing program development information and support for state and territorial waste program managers and staff is ASTSWMO’s core strength and the cornerstone of its mission. As the states and territories emerge as both the innovators and the leaders in environmental program implementation, they will increasingly rely on each other (rather than the federal government) to find answers to complex environmental problems. Over the next three to five years, ASTSWMO will re-emphasize program development support for state and territorial waste program managers and staff. Creating the infrastructure for good program development and support, and sharing of program information among states and territories will be ASTSWMO’s highest priority. From this strength, ASTSWMO will position itself to address high priority issues such as resources, technical assistance and environmental indicators.
To re-emphasize program development and support, ASTSWMO will use a new set of operating principles. These operating principles ask Subcommittees and Task Forces to examine their work – both current and future – in light of some of the key elements of improved program development and support. They are intended to encourage Subcommittees and Task Forces to, within the context of their on-going work and responsibilities, emphasize their focus on activities that contribute to and support program development and information sharing among states and territories. The operating principles are:

**Inform.** Subcommittees and Task Forces should look for opportunities to more effectively collect, retain, and distribute good, accurate information about program development activities in critical areas or around critical issues to ASTSWMO membership. Building this information focus and infrastructure will create more, and more meaningful, ways for states and territories to support one another.

**Innovate.** States and territories are already the laboratories of innovation. Subcommittees and Task Forces should look for opportunities to “shine a light” on innovative activities in states and territories and on program successes. Approaches that use resources more efficiently (or exploit new sources of funding) will be especially important to highlight as responsibilities continue to grow while funding levels remain static or decrease.

**Learn from each other.** Sharing information about their programs in real-time is one of the most meaningful ways in which states and territories can support each other in program development. Subcommittees and Task Forces should create opportunities for states and territories to network with each other in real-time, develop methods to hear and respond to program development questions, and expand peer matching.

**Teach.** Subcommittees and Task Forces should reach out to each other and to the general membership, both before their work products are complete and after, to encourage cross-program interaction and learning. Subcommittees and Task Forces should also look for opportunities to reach out to other audiences in the regulated and environmental communities and in other areas to educate on environmental requirements and the work of state and territorial waste programs.

**Highlight cross-media and cross-program implications.** State and territorial waste programs must operate in concert with each other and with other environmental programs. Subcommittees and Task Forces should highlight cross-program (e.g., waste management to cleanup; solid waste to hazardous waste) and cross-media (e.g., waste to air; water to waste) implications of their work and recommendations, always looking for opportunities to complement another program or media area.

**Build partnerships.** ASTSWMO must reach out to those who can help it support program development in the states and territories. In addition to maintaining and improving traditional partnerships with EPA and other Federal agencies and with ECOS and NGA, Subcommittees and Task Forces should consider new partnerships – for example, with local governments or with coalitions of the business or environmental communities.

These new operating principles do not represent a fundamental shift for ASTSWMO; program development and support has always been a cornerstone of the Association’s work. By putting words to these operating principles and recording them as ASTSWMO’s highest priority, the Association hopes to reinvigorate its commitment to serving the membership through program development and support.
IV. Strategic Direction #2: National Policy Development

Participating in national policy development through statutory change, regulations and guidance remains a key area for ASTSWMO. As always, however, ASTSWMO must be careful in choosing the national policy development issues upon which to focus and in determining what level of effort is appropriate. This need for strategic choices will increase as ASTSWMO reemphasizes program development support.

As ASTSWMO works to balance its desire to concentrate efforts in providing program development support with the need to continue to participate in the national policy debate, the Association needs a clear set of expectations for how it will work to influence national policy. ASTSWMO takes pride that the work of the Association – the projects or policy initiatives on which the Association chooses to focus and the Association’s policy positions – is primarily conducted by people closest to the work of state and territorial waste programs, that is, by the Subcommittees and Task Forces. ASTSWMO will continue to rely on Subcommittees and Task forces to identify priority national policy development issues and to develop the Association’s basic positions on these issues.

As ASTSWMO makes its strategic choices about participation in national policy development, it will use a new set of operating principles. These operating principles are intended to guide Subcommittees and Task Forces as they examine their work – both current and future – to assess the value to the Association and its member states and territories of ASTSWMO’s participation in specific national policy issues. They are intended to encourage Subcommittees and Task Forces to, within the context of their ongoing work and responsibilities, identify policy areas where ASTSWMO’s participation should be focused. These operating principles are:

Identify and define. Subcommittees and Task Forces are at the leading edge of program implementation work; they will continue to identify and define the priority national policy issues on which ASTSWMO will focus.

Understand and articulate. Participating in the national policy debate requires a clear understanding of critical state and territorial needs/issues around each policy area as well as an understanding of the applicable policy boundaries, if any, established by the Environmental Council of the States (ECOS) and the National Governors Association (NGA). Subcommittees and Task Forces will develop ASTSWMO’s policy position and supporting information for the priority national policy issues on which ASTSWMO focuses, including information on critical state and territorial needs/issues (and the basis for those needs and issues) and an analysis of consistency with ECOS and NGA policy positions.

Build partnerships and alliances. Just as ASTSWMO must partner with ECOS and NGA in developing and articulating critical state and territorial needs/issues in national policy, the Association must reach out to other potential partners such as local governments and the business and environmental communities. Subcommittees and Task Forces should strengthen current ASTSWMO relationships with the environmental and business communities, other potential partners and constituents, and develop new partnerships when needed to advance ASTSWMO’s effectiveness in influencing national policy decisions.
Create positions that can be generally supported by state and territorial members. Subcommittees and Task Forces are primarily responsible for working with each other and with the general ASTSWMO membership to create positions around priority national policy issues that can be supported by most states and territories.

As always, the ASTSWMO Board will assist the Subcommittees and Task Forces with identifying priority national policy areas, building necessary partnerships, and resolving conflicts among the states and territories. The Board will also work to manage ASTSWMO’s resources so the Association focuses an appropriate level of effort on each priority national policy issue.

In the context of managing ASTSWMO’s national policy development resources efficiently, consideration must be given to the pros and cons of a proactive approach vs. a reactive approach. ASTSWMO will never have the resources to fully participate in every national policy debate. At the same time, there are some issues – for example, the current work on cleanup consistency and on developing a better understanding of the true costs of a RCRA hazardous waste program – around which the Association sees a need to be “out in front.” There are also benefits to using resources to position the Association to respond quickly and efficiently to a variety of issues. Much of the work ASTSWMO will conduct for program development and support (including the new information management initiative discussed below) will also support the Association’s ability to influence national policy debate by positioning itself to respond to policy issues quickly with practical, balanced, information about the experience of program implementers.

V. Carrying out ASTSWMO’s Strategic Directions: Near-Term Opportunities

To move ASTSWMO in the strategic directions established by this 2001 Strategic Plan the Association will initially focus its activities in four areas: information management, technical assistance, resources, and environmental indicators. Activities ASTSWMO conducts in these four areas will evolve in program-specific ways as the Subcommittees and Task Forces identify opportunities to realign their work using the guidance and direction established by this 2001 Strategic Plan.

A. Near-Term Opportunity: Information Management

ASTSWMO believes that it has an opportunity to develop a new approach to information management that will improve its ability to help states and territories with program development and support, and that will position the Association to be able to more effectively influence national waste policies. ASTSWMO intends to develop a new information management approach that is designed to further the operating principles enumerated for both of those strategic directions.

As technology continues to advance, the ASTSWMO membership increasingly needs the Association to provide timely, efficient access to information – both in the sense of keeping statistics (How many states have dedicated household hazardous waste collection facilities? What are the cleanup levels for lead?) and in being able to quickly provide answers to specific questions or access to individuals in state or territorial programs who might answer questions. ASTSWMO’s role as a catalyst for states and territories to learn from and support one another will require the infrastructure to provide timely access to good, state- and territory-specific program information. Similarly, states and territories will be better positioned to influence the national policy debate if they can include real, practical program development and implementation information in their positions.
ASTSWMO will rise to the challenge of this emerging role to serve as an information clearinghouse for state and territorial waste programs. The Association recognizes that developing the capacity to collect, retain, manage, and provide timely access to accurate—and, in some cases, detailed—information about state and territorial waste programs will require thoughtful development and considerable resources. It also brings great opportunities to serve the membership in a dynamic way.

Over the next three to five years, ASTSWMO will develop and implement a new information management approach. In developing and implementing this new approach, ASTSWMO will attempt to provide certain types of information management functionality, including: ability to share information and expertise across states and territories; ability to link directly to state and territory specific information and documents (e.g., technical assistance documents); and, ability to track or catalogue questions asked and answers given for future reference. ASTSWMO will also address the different types of information and responses that might be needed. For example, in some cases a simple survey is all that is needed with no requirement that all states and territories reply and no compilation or analysis of responses. In other cases, a more detailed response and analysis, including compilation of information by ASTSWMO staff, might be needed.

In all cases, the test of success for ASTSWMO’s new information management approach will be the degree to which it helps ASTSWMO and its member states and territories meet the operating principles and further the Association’s strategic directions as described in this 2001 Strategic Plan. Information will not be collected and managed as an end in itself—only if it helps ASTSWMO to better serve its members.

ASTSWMO recognizes that creating a new information management approach is not just hardware and software—it will also require a culture of responsiveness in the states and territories so that program managers and staff respond quickly, completely, and accurately to information requests. At the same time, ASTSWMO sees that states and territories could be easily overwhelmed with questions from each other, so they will need to develop systems to thoughtfully create and manage information requests and to respect each other's limited resources.

**Near-Term Action – Information Management.** Over the next six months, the ASTSWMO staff will work with the Executive Committee to scope and prepare a plan for developing a new information management approach.

**B. Near-Term Opportunity: Technical Assistance**

Over the next three to five years, ASTSWMO will focus on three types of technical assistance: technical assistance ASTSWMO would like the federal government to provide, technical assistance ASTSWMO will provide to its membership, and technical assistance ASTSWMO’s members might provide to their external “customers” e.g., the regulated and environmental communities.

ASTSWMO will work with EPA and other interested Federal agencies to expand the Federal government’s role in providing meaningful technical assistance to state and territorial waste program implementers. Providing technical assistance on critical programmatic and technical issues is a role that EPA is uniquely positioned to carry out. As more and more program implementation responsibility is shifted to states and territories through devolution, it is appropriate for EPA to shift some of its focus away from direct program implementation and development towards providing technical assistance and
support to state and territorial waste program managers. ASTSWMO would like to work with EPA to identify technical assistance priorities in three areas: training; technical expertise, including capacity to directly provide states and territories some key services in specific program areas or in response to a specific problem; and scientific and technical research.

Based on its decision to emphasize providing program development support to its membership, ASTSWMO is also interested in expanding its own capacity to provide technical assistance both within the Association and from the Association to the states and territories’ primary customers, the regulated and environmental communities. Increasing capacity to provide technical assistance within ASTSWMO will focus primarily on creating new, more efficient ways to identify technical staff and information in the states and territories and then to distribute this information using existing ASTSWMO mechanisms, such as the annual and mid-year meetings, the peer match program, and topic-specific workshops and seminars. Expanding ASTSWMO’s role in providing technical assistance to the regulated and environmental communities will start with creating the capacity to share state/territorial technical assistance and outreach materials within ASTSWMO’s membership. This may be followed by a survey of key representatives of the business and environmental communities to better understand their technical assistance needs.

C. Near-Term Opportunity: Resources

As workloads and responsibilities expand, states and territories can support one another by sharing information about ways to implement programs more efficiently and opportunities for new or innovative sources of funding. Over the next three to five years, ASTSWMO will focus its efforts around resources in three areas.

First, ASTSWMO will complete the issue paper on funding for state and territorial RCRA Subtitle C programs with a view towards clearly communicating the core responsibilities of RCRA program implementers and the way these core responsibilities have expanded over the years compared to static or decreasing Federal funding.
Second, ASTSWMO will explore opportunities for states and territories to share information on innovative funding sources and approaches. For example, some states have dramatically increased their state general fund allocation. Other states have obtained funding for specific projects from Federal agencies other than EPA and/or from private sources. Sharing information on innovative funding sources and approaches will complement continued information sharing on innovative, more efficient program implementation approaches. ASTSWMO will also consider collecting more detailed information on the funding mix in each state and territory and on any state- or territory-specific resource limitations (e.g., FTE caps).

Finally, the ASTSWMO staff will operate a clearinghouse for information on potential sources of funding for state and territorial waste programs. Just as ASTSWMO has historically provided, and will continue to provide, help and support to states and territories in making more efficient use of existing funds, the Association will develop a role in helping states and territories identify and pursue new avenues of funding.

**D. Near-Term Opportunity: Environmental Indicators**

Environmental indicators for waste programs generally fall into two areas: measures of the preventative nature of the programs and measures of progress in remediation. It is likely that environmental indicators, or performance measures, will continue to be emphasized at the Federal level and with ECOS and NGA. Much progress has been made in individual states since ASTSWMO worked with ECOS to develop the waste-related core performance measures as part of the National Environmental Performance Partnerships process. While this plan does not advocate initiating an independent effort to evaluate environmental indicators for waste programs, ASTSWMO must understand the evolution of core measures to position itself to participate effectively in any national discussion about environmental indicators.

**Near-Term Action – Resources.** The Hazardous Waste Subcommittee will lead the effort to complete the issue paper on funding for state and territorial RCRA Subtitle C programs.

**Near-Term Action – Resources.** A small ad hoc Board group will consider how ASTSWMO can best support the states and territories around resource issues and will develop an initial set of activities in this area.

**Near-Term Action – Environmental Indicators.** A small ad hoc Board group will develop a catalogue of waste program environmental indicator approaches within the states and territories. The catalogue will include information on the data states and territories use to support their environmental indicators, success of indicators as a management tool to date, and the audiences or constituencies the indicators serve. This group will also work with the ASTSWMO Board and staff to ensure that the Association is appropriately positioned to participate in any national discussion about environmental indicators that might arise in the coming months.
VI. ASTSWMO Structure and Organization

Just as the 2001 strategic directions – program development support for state and territorial waste programs and influence of national waste program policy decisions – reaffirm ASTSWMO’s core mission, the 2001 strategic planning discussion has reaffirmed ASTSWMO’s core structure. While some work focus areas may shift to increase the focus on program development support or emphasize priority policy issues, in general, the roles of ASTSWMO staff, the ASTSWMO Board, Subcommittees, and Task Forces are appropriate to pursue the Association’s strategic directions successfully. The types of small, issue-specific, ad hoc Board groups formed to carry out some of the near-term activities developed as part of this strategic plan are meant to complement, not replace, the existing ASTSWMO structure. The types of networking and other opportunities already established by the Association (e.g., yearly Subcommittee meetings; mid-year and annual meetings; Subcommittee and Task Force conference calls; special meetings or conferences on specific topics) will continue to be the primary mechanisms used to identify specific work activities and carry out the Strategic Plan.

The 2001 Strategic Planning discussion highlighted that ASTSWMO, like any other organization, must manage itself in a climate of constant change. The Association must remain nimble to address the changing needs and activities of its membership and to recognize and seize new opportunities. Over the next three to five years, as ASTSWMO moves forward along its two strategic directions, the Association will work to remain responsive to the changing climate for environmental protection programs and to model good change management practices.

VII. Keeping Focused on the Strategic Directions

ASTSWMO is committed to keeping its focus on the strategic directions established by this 2001 Strategic Plan. Within the next six months, each Subcommittee and Task Force should compare their current and planned work to this 2001 Strategic Plan and make adjustments if necessary. In the area of program development and support for states and territories, the examination should review current and planned work in light of the key operating principles (inform, innovate, learn from each other, teach, highlight cross-media and cross-program implications, and build partnerships), and look for new opportunities to emphasize activities that contribute to and support program development and sharing among the states and territories.

In the area of influencing national waste program policy and directions, the examination should ensure that each Subcommittee continues to focus on the highest priority national policy issues. Subcommittees should also evaluate the level of effort that each initiative requires of ASTSWMO and its members. The ASTSWMO Board will maintain a list of priority national policy issues in which ASTSWMO is participating, and will track the level of effort devoted to each issue.

The ASTSWMO Board will discuss progress in moving forward along the strategic directions at each meeting. In addition, as Subcommittees or Task Forces bring decisions (or completed projects) to the ASTSWMO Board, the supporting information should include an explanation of how the recommended action relates to the 2001 Strategic Plan and whether or not the Plan continues to reflect the needs and priorities of the Association. As the near-term action items called for in the Plan are completed, new commitments will be made, evaluated against the strategic directions, recorded, and carried out. Finally, the 2001 Strategic Plan will become part of ASTSWMO’s on-going conversation with the new EPA Administration and with the Environmental Council of States, the National Governors Association, and other partners.
The members of ASTSWMO offer their thanks to the following people who participated in the development of this 2001 Strategic Plan:

- David Finley, President
- Mark Giesfeldt, Vice President
- Mike Kelly, Past President
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- Jennifer Kaduck, Region 4 Board representative
- Mike Savage, Region 5 Board representative
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- Mary Jean Yon, Solid Waste Subcommittee chair
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- Bill Ross, Ross & Associates
- Elizabeth McManus, Ross & Associates