

Designers must address global regulatory issues

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D-M-E Co.

(April 28, 2008) -- Designers and manufacturers need to pay attention to regulatory considerations in this global market.

Two electronics directives implemented by the European Union, RoHS (Restriction of Hazardous Substances in electronic equipment) and WEEE (Waste Electrical and Electronic Equipment), drastically changed the way manufacturers make products and even how they work with one another.

RoHS prohibits or restricts the use of certain potentially harmful materials in electronics equipment. WEEE requires manufacturers to reacquire and recycle equipment made after August 2005.



Messerknecht

Interpretation poses one of the greatest challenges with these rules. Our company resolved this conflict by altering all part designs in our mold technologies business that are affected — from circuit boards to small components — to comply with the most stringent interpretations of RoHS and WEEE. This ensures the products are accepted everywhere.

Finding substitutes for banned materials may involve seeking assistance from research institutes or contract manufacturers. To prove compliance later, we have improved barcode symbology as we re-engineer our products.

We're also working with suppliers and outsourcing partners to ensure supply-chain compliance and consistent quality standards, which may be the most important aspect of RoHS-WEEE. Your internal operations can be completely compliant, but if your suppliers or your suppliers' suppliers are not, you're risking expensive fines and even product recalls.

While our customers still have temperature controls from the 1970s, the lifespan of today's consumer electronics aren't as long. We have to consider whether consumers will pay to repair inexpensive items or bother returning them to manufacturers.

Becoming compliant may seem like an insurmountable hurdle with no benefits. But hang in there; you'll start to see time and money savings on complex environmental compliance issues once you've eliminated lead-based processes. Re-evaluating products for RoHS also can improve their reliability and quality.

Finally, having the flexibility to respond quickly to these changes can help you gain customers. We have embraced these changes, and our customers have rewarded us, making it all worthwhile.

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