



Beverage Industry Environmental Roundtable

Water Footprint Working Group

What is our purpose?

The Beverage Industry Environmental Roundtable (BIER), a coalition of global beverage companies, has formed a Water Footprint Working Group to develop sector-specific guidelines for calculating the water footprint of a product or enterprise.

What is the Working Group's Objective?

BIER will use its unique expertise and member support to establish common water footprinting boundaries, definitions, and calculation methods for the beverage industry. The Working Group's efforts will inform and catalyze other existing initiatives by providing an in-depth analysis of sector-specific considerations.

BIER is targeting 2010 to release beverage sector guidelines for water footprinting.

Why is water footprinting important to BIER?

The reality of water scarcity and the growing demand for water present significant challenges for the beverage industry and to the communities in which we work and live. Implementing a rigorous water management plan that is comprehensive of the value chain is essential. BIER members seek to proactively address these issues through identifying and reducing water usage and impacts across the entire value chain – what is known as a water footprint - and are partnering with local communities to ensure sustainable supplies of water for all stakeholders. Understanding the water footprint of a product or enterprise is integral to the beverage sector's success on addressing these issues.

How does BIER's work add value?

Although several organizations have forwarded the water footprinting discussion, efforts to develop a common platform or methodology significantly lag progress made on similar efforts with greenhouse gas emissions and carbon. Like carbon, water is closely connected with the long-term sustainability of the global economy. At the same time, the two have quite different characteristics and impacts. Water is more immediate in terms of both space and time. It has a more direct and identifiable socioeconomic impact, and it needs to be handled on a local basis, with solutions tailored to circumstances. These complexities make defining a universal water footprint methodology a tremendous challenge and require detailed analysis of the quantity and impact of water use throughout the value chain.

Although several BIER member companies are represented on existing water footprinting efforts, there are expected to be critical gaps between a generic water footprinting model

and one that accurately reflects unique aspects of water use in the beverage sector. BIER members see this as a leadership opportunity to leverage unique technical expertise and recent experience completing beverage sector-specific guidelines for greenhouse gas (GHG) reporting.

BIER is finalizing beverage sector guidance for calculating GHG emissions in 2009.

How will BIER collaborate with similar research?

In order to coordinate efforts to further develop and disseminate knowledge on water footprinting concepts, methods and tools, BIER plans to work in parallel with a number of organizations that are addressing this issue. This includes ISO who is currently developing an international water footprinting standard. BIER has also initiated contact with the Water Footprint Network (WFN), the World Wildlife Fund and UNEP/SETAC.

What is the Working Group's plan and schedule?

The BIER Water Footprint Working Group will develop and publish specific water footprinting guidelines for the beverage sector in 2010. Completing this task will require the Working Group to tackle complex water use and impact accounting issues, both upstream and downstream in the value chain. For instance, the largest usage of water in the beverage sector is embedded in the production of raw materials such as agricultural ingredients, fibers and metals/plastics for packaging. For many beverage companies, raw material production lies far upstream from direct operations, and as a result they may not have access to accurate and reliable water usage data and the impact of that usage on the local ecosystem. The working group, by focusing on a single sector scope, will address these data and impact gaps and establish guidelines representing the best knowledge of the global beverage sector.

These final guidelines will provide detailed instructions for specific inputs and operations that are unique to the beverage industry. The BIER Water Footprint Working Group will review a draft version of the methodology at BIER meetings in the spring of 2010. The release of a final beverage sector guidance document is scheduled by the end of 2010.

The working group is open to considering additional partnership opportunities with governmental and non-governmental organizations during this development stage. Specific questions can be directed to info@bierroundtable.com.