

Life Cycle assessment as a rational basis of environmental policy

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Life cycle assessment LCA has become a powerful instrument during the last twenty years and its importance - especially for decision makers in the field of environmental protection - is still increasing. This development was only possible because the field of application became broader and because clear rules for establishing LCA were developed.

Authorities in many countries and also in Switzerland use LCA as one important basis for decisions. In the past, we used LCA to improve packaging and to decide, whether used materials should be recycled or disposed off, by incineration with energy recovery. Recently, the LCA tool was very helpful in Switzerland for screening the environmental impact of different non fossil fuels, in view of new legislation which provides tax exemptions for certain biologically produced fuels. Another important and broadly utilized application of LCA is the evaluation of the environmental impact of different cars. For this purpose LCA integrates the environmental burden caused by different pollutants emitted by cars as carbon dioxide, nitrogen oxides or particulate mater (PM 10).

In the future, LCA will likely be applied to additional fields, such as investments, where LCA are increasingly used as tool to rate the sustainability of companies.

Fundamental conditions for the use of LCA in all fields are: a reliable scientific base of the inventories and a transparent elaboration of the LCA. As LCA will become increasingly important, an internationally harmonized system will have to guarantee that the results of LCA are objective and that the process is traceable.