# SAP takes environmental reporting to the cloud

German software giant SAP today announced two new products that will embrace the cloud to improve supply-chain management and regulatory compliance for manufacturers.

The news marks the latest attempt to make it easier for suppliers to provide data about their products, an increasingly difficult task as more corporations work to make their value chains more sustainable. Less than two weeks ago, EcoVadis and the Carbon Disclosure Project announced a partnership to help streamline the growing number of requests for supply-chain sustainability information.

SAP's new products include the Product Stewardship Network and EHS Regulatory Documentation OnDemand. Both are based on the idea of sharing information so that it only has to be collected once -- data about supply-chain materials, in the case of the Product Stewardship Network, and data about environmental safety regulations, in the case of the EHS Regulatory Documentation OnDemand.

"What's important is that we're not just using cloud versions of existing SAP solutions," says Dieter Haesslein, vice president of sustainability solution development at SAP. "We really use the cloud where it makes most sense, when we can take advantage of the opportunity for lowering burdens."

The Product Stewardship Network is a network that enables manufacturers and suppliers to collaborate and collect information more easily about the substances in their products.

"Think of it like LinkedIn for product compliance," Haesslein says. "Basically, companies can connect with each other and keep them updated" on what's in their product.

Currently, it can be difficult for manufacturers to get a detailed list of the materials in their suppliers' products, mostly because suppliers are overwhelmed with these types of requests, he adds.

If, say, a computer manufacturer wants to roll out a new laptop, it must first make sure all of its outside suppliers' products use materials that meet the environmental regulations in all of the markets where it wants to sell the laptop. As it stands now, the process of figuring this out usually involves sending many, many emails back and forth between manufacturers and suppliers.

How many? One SAP customer receives thousands of these inquiries a month, says Scott Bolick, vice president of sustainability solution management.

With its Product Stewardship Network, SAP hopes to cut out those thousands of emails -- and countless hours -- by giving suppliers a place to publish that information once for all of their partners to see, instead of having to send it separately to everyone.

Basic membership -- which enables suppliers and manufacturers to connect with each other, share product data and get regulatory information -- is free, but SAP is also offering additional services -- including mass uploads of product data, bulk supplier invitations and tech support -- starting at $160 per month.

05/11/2012