

Satellites take sustainability to new heights

Shell Canada has incorporated Earth Observation data into its Sustainable Development Report, demonstrating the potential of satellites to provide a global and cost-effective way to measure objectively the sustainability of business activities.

Companies that aim to create wealth while also contributing to the long-term quality of life and respect for the environment regularly issue environmental audits of their Corporate Sustainable Development (CSD) activities and report on the 'triple bottom line' of economic, social and environmental impacts.

In order to quantify sustainability, accurate and timely information on the state of the environment is needed, which Earth Observation (EO) from space can provide.

In 2005, ESA began working with large multinational companies as part of its Earth Observation Support for Corporate Sustainable Development Reporting (EO-CSD) project to integrate satellite data into CSD reporting practices across a wide variety of industrial sectors.

Eyes in the sky

EO provides objective coverage across both space and time, EO images show the world through a wide-enough frame so that complete large-scale phenomena can be observed with great accuracy. Satellites also remain in place for long periods, making them able to highlight environmental changes occurring gradually.

Based on EO image analysis, mine activity and vegetation habitat change information was provided for the 2006 Shell Canada Sustainable Development Report, which was developed in accordance with the 2006 guidelines of the Global Reporting Initiative (GRI). The GRI provides a framework for sustainability reporting, which includes a set of reporting guidelines to enable reporting on economic, environmental, and social performance.

Knowledge sharing

The EO information is not only valuable for corporate environmental management purposes, but can also provide local residents with unbiased information regarding the impact of developments in their communities.

Therefore, the EO-CSD project team continues to work with local Aboriginal communities to demonstrate how EO can be used as part of Shell Canada and Albion Sands corporate commitments to sustainable development.