



PROCEEDINGS OF SPIE
SPIE—The International Society for Optical Engineering

Environmentally Conscious Manufacturing III

Surendra M. Gupta
Chair/Editor

29–30 October 2003
Providence, Rhode Island, USA

Sponsored and Published by
SPIE—The International Society for Optical Engineering



Volume 5262

SPIE is an international technical society dedicated to advancing engineering and scientific applications of optical, photonic, imaging, electronic, and optoelectronic technologies.



The papers published in this volume compose the proceedings of the technical conference cited on the cover and title page. Papers were selected by the conference program committee, and were subject to review by the editors and program committee. The inclusion of these papers in this publication does not necessarily constitute endorsement by the editors or SPIE.

Please use the following format to cite material from this book:

Author(s), "Title of Paper," in *Environmentally Conscious Manufacturing III*, edited by Surendra M. Gupta, Proceedings of SPIE Vol. 5262 (SPIE, Bellingham, WA, 2004) page numbers.

ISSN 0277-786X
ISBN 0-8194-5151-7

Published by
SPIE—The International Society for Optical Engineering
P.O. Box 10, Bellingham, Washington 98227-0010 USA
Telephone 1 360/676-3290 (Pacific Time) · Fax 1 360/647-1445
<http://www.spie.org>

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Printed in the United States of America.

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Introduction

Environmentally Conscious Manufacturing (ECM) is an emerging discipline that is concerned with developing methods for manufacturing new products from conceptual design to final delivery and ultimately to the end-of-life disposal such that all the environmental standards and requirements are satisfied. Industrialized countries all over the world are facing serious aftermath because of the rapid development that has taken place in the last few decades.

In recent years, environmental awareness and recycling regulations have been putting pressure on many manufacturers and consumers, forcing them to produce and dispose of products in an environmentally responsible manner. Government regulations are becoming more persuasive and thus many manufacturers feel the pressure to use recycled materials whenever possible. Sometimes they are even required to take care of their products at the end of their useful lives. This has created a need to design products that are friendly towards the environment, and easy to disassemble and recycle. To that end, there is a need to develop algorithms, models, heuristics and software for addressing recycling and other end-of-life issues (such as the economic viability and the logistic aspects of disassembly, recycling and remanufacturing) for an ever-increasing number of discarded products.

The Third International Conference on Environmentally Conscious Manufacturing (ECM) that took place in Providence, Rhode Island, USA during October 29-30, 2003 tried to do its part in addressing the above mentioned needs. Both academicians and the industrial community in the United States and abroad participated in this very timely conference. The conference provided a forum for the latest developments in the field of ECM.

This volume is a compilation of the papers selected for the conference. The papers included here represent the wide variety of fronts where research activity is taking place in the general area of ECM. Based on the quality and variety of papers included in this volume, it is clear that the conference was a success. It is my hope that this volume will inspire further research in ECM and motivate new researchers to get interested in this all too important field of study.

The conference and this volume would not have been possible without the devotion and commitment of the authors. They have been very patient in preparing their manuscripts. I would also like to express my appreciation for having been given the opportunity to organize and chair this conference. I especially want to thank the SPIE staff for providing seamless support in unraveling all of the obstacles that arose in putting the conference and this volume together.

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