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Environment

Corporate America Goes Green

Carolyn Phenicie 10.03.07, 12:00 PM ET

WASHINGTON, D.C. - Big and small, established and start-up, companies across the U.S. are taking steps to reduce their negative environmental impacts. Whether ensuring sustainable agriculture and seafood production, reducing the use of synthetic chemicals in favor of plant-based alternatives or teaching children about endangered animals through its products, some major American companies are doing their part to protect the environment.

Established corporations like McDonald's take a holistic approach to "going green." The fast food giant uses a scorecard to rate its suppliers of beef, pork, chicken, potatoes and baked goods.

It also rates its fish suppliers on several conservation and biodiversity criteria and since 2005 has moved over 18,000 metric tons of purchases away from suppliers who do not meet its green criteria. Earlier this summer, it announced that its fleet of U.K. delivery trucks would be powered with biodiesel made from recycled cooking oil from its restaurants.

Other companies, like Office Depot, are taking smaller steps to encourage sustainability. The office supply retailer's Green Book helps business customers find the most environmentally friendly products among the thousands the retailer offers.

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Some companies support nonprofits that work to maintain sustainability. Adidas, Gap, H&M and Ikea all support the Better Cotton Initiative. This group, which estimates that cotton consumes 11% of the world's pesticides and 2.4% of arable land, encourages better cotton farming practices.

Smaller companies have also taken up the "green" crusade. Xeko produces a line of children's card games, each of which is set in one of 34 international "hot spots." "Mission: Madagascar," "Mission: Costa Rica" and "Mission: Indonesia." are already released. The characters in each game are endangered animals and those that are more endangered are worth more points. The cards are printed on recycled paper with soy-based ink and sold with minimal packaging.

Another small company, Ideal Jacobs, recently revamped its screen-printing production to reduce its solid waste per dollar of sales by 50%. This Maplewood, N.J.-based company joined EPA's Performance Track program five years ago. Since then it has slashed in half its solid waste per dollar of sales. All of the company's 28 employees are responsible for making their personal production responsibilities more efficient. The new policies have eliminated the need for government permits, increased profits and trimmed employee turnover.

Though companies are working to fix various environmental problems, many are working to reduce the impact of global warming. The 15 warmest years on record since 1856 have occurred in the last 15 years, according to the U.K. Meteorological Office and the Climate Research Unit of the University of East Anglia for the World Meteorological Organization.

Carbon dioxide is the major global warming gas, accounting for 80% of pollution that has impacted the earth's temperature. Atmospheric levels of carbon dioxide are higher than at any point in the last 420,000 years, which is the result of human activity, according to the World Wildlife Federation.

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Office Depot

The office supply company releases its "GreenBook" to contract customers every year. The catalogue shows which of the company's products is most environmentally friendly. The company has committed to purchasing paper from well-managed forests and encourages the use of recycled paper. It uses 35% post-consumer recycled content paper in its internal operations and its top-selling "Red Top" paper has an average of 10% post-consumer recycled content.

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