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Report: Environmental Education Matters More in a Down Economy

Survey results, case studies demonstrate how being green can help save green

WASHINGTON, D.C. –A first-of-its-kind national survey and report finds that an environmentally educated workforce is becoming more than good public corporate citizenship – it is increasingly essential to a business' bottom line.

In the current economic downturn, employees committed to saving energy can save money. Innovations that can lessen a company's environmental impact can also improve its bottom line.

"The Engaged Organization," released today by the [National Environmental Education Foundation](#), finds that the majority of companies surveyed (65 percent) value environmental and sustainability knowledge in their employees.

More than three out of four surveyed said that knowledge will increase in importance as a hiring factor within five years. A similar percentage said that they educate employees about environment and sustainability goals while nearly half of those that had no program believe their companies will begin educating employees within two years, reinforcing the move toward a green economy.

Environmentally educated employees are important. What companies do with their employees' knowledge can make a tremendous difference in improving a company's performance.

"Even in a down economy, environmental education is a growth industry," said Diane Wood, president of the National Environmental Education Foundation (NEEF). "The survey findings and case studies demonstrate that environmental education has evolved from green practices to lessen their impact on the earth – they do it to improve their bottom line and streamline their operations."

More than 1,300 environmental professionals – 90 percent from companies – participated in the survey. NEEF's report also includes case studies from eight small and large companies, including Cisco Systems, Inc., Stonyfield, Inc., Johnson & Johnson, Inc., Interface, Inc., The Accessory Corporation, Inc., Wal-Mart Stores, Inc., Clean Clothes, Inc. and the Hewlett-Packard Company. It found that no one size fits all; in fact, a wide variety of efforts are taking place in companies around the country.

- More than half a million Wal-Mart employees have been engaged in sustainability efforts and have pledged to take actions that include conserving energy and helping the environment at work and at home. One employee's suggestion to turn off lights in vending machines after hours saved the company \$1 million a year.

- Stonyfield challenges all of its employees to facilitate better energy use and implemented a bonus plan. With employee-led conservation, the company reduced its energy use per ton of product by 22 percent and employees received a bonus.
- Cisco encourages employees to consider alternatives to airline travel before booking tickets. The company Web site reminds employees to use the company's own technology to reduce expenses and the company's environmental footprint.

Along with releasing the report, NEEF also announced the creation of the Business Sustainability Education Roundtable, a forum for corporations, government agencies, academics and sustainability organizations to develop collaborative projects and to share best practices, tools, resources and tips on how to effectively engage their employees in sustainability education initiatives at work, at home and in their communities.

The case studies demonstrate a variety of approaches to lessening a company's environmental impact while improving the bottom line. That was the inspiration behind the Business Sustainability Education Roundtable, said Ken Strassner, vice president for Global Environment, Safety, Regulatory and Scientific Affairs for the Kimberly-Clark Corporation.

"As the report indicates, there are a lot of different approaches to environmental education that vary based on a company's size, mission and goals," Strassner said. "The Business Sustainability Education Roundtable will facilitate idea sharing among companies with the goal of advancing environmental and sustainability education on a much wider scale. Sharing best practices also means we can help companies improve their environmental education efforts on a cost-effective basis."

Companies and organizations that have expressed interest in joining NEEF's Roundtable include:

- **Darden Restaurants**
- **George Washington University**
- **HydroPoint Data Systems, Inc.**
- **Johnson & Johnson, Inc.**
- **Kimberly-Clark Corp.**
- **Lockheed Martin Corp.**

[Click here](#) to access the report.

Presentations from representatives of Stonyfield, Interface, Cisco and Johnson & Johnson will be available as part of a webinar held Wednesday, March 18. Check the NEEF Business & Environment [home page](#) for more information.

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Special thanks to [Webex](#) and Cisco for sponsorship of the webinar