

As consumer preference grows for sustainably-produced goods and services, companies are increasingly being expected to 'walk the talk' on claims of eco-friendliness.

This issue covers some examples of externally-verified best practice in corporate sustainability, as well as the Commerce Commission's efforts to crack down on 'greenwashing'.

The Government's eco-verification initiative aims to speed business uptake of internationally recognised environmental indicators.

The initiative is led by the Ministry of Economic Development (MED), in partnership with the Ministry for the Environment. For more information, visit the MED website at www.med.govt.nz (keyword search 'eco-verification').

Kind Regards



Lindsay Gow

DEPUTY SECRETARY
MINISTRY FOR THE ENVIRONMENT



> Nicholas Blake manages environmental policy at Langham Hotel in Auckland

From dishwasher to eco-champion

Nicholas Blake used to wash dishes at the Langham Hotel in Auckland – but thanks to his passion for the environment, he has now well and truly hung up his tea-towel.

While working as a steward, Nicholas came up with a bunch of ideas on how the hotel could manage itself more sustainably. The hotel management were so impressed that they swapped his apron for a suit and put him in charge of 'greening' the hotel.

Less than a year later, Nicholas' efforts have led to the Langham gaining prestigious 'Green Globe' certification. The hotel sustainability template he designed is now being applied throughout Langham Group hotels around the world.

"I initially didn't set out to secure a new job and saw it more as a stepping stone. But I guess it just shows that if you're passionate about something and determined to make a difference, you can get yourself recognised," Nicholas says.

His achievement was recognised at the Minister for the Environment's Green Ribbon Awards this year, when he took out the 'Business Making a Difference' category. At the awards ceremony, timed to launch New Zealand's hosting of World Environment Day, tribute was paid to Nicholas' passion and ability to inspire and motivate others. >>

'From dishwasher to eco-champion' continued...

Nicholas' passion for the environment was kindled as a child when he spent time living in Fiji. He became concerned at the decline of coral reefs while diving around the islands. On returning to New Zealand, he gained a tertiary qualification in environmental science, but couldn't get a job in that field after graduating.

"I was living across the road from the Langham at the time, so I took a job there as a kitchen hand," he said.

"I noticed that we were throwing a lot of stuff away and there were no environmental policies. We didn't have environmental goals or objectives as such. So I started making some notes, and produced a report."

He gave the report to the hotel's Human Resources manager, who was impressed and passed it around management. By good luck, just two weeks later the hotel's managing director, John Dick, was given a mandate at an executive board meeting to make the Langham a sustainable hotel company.

"John came back from Hong Kong with this new sustainability mandate, and he invited me up to his office to talk more," Nicholas says. "I borrowed a suit from a friend and nervously laid out my ideas. We talked for an hour or so and a week later he hired me as the hotel's environmental project supervisor."

Nicholas set about writing a sustainability blueprint and best practice goals for the hotel. This covered areas like environmentally friendly purchasing, stationery, energy saving light-bulbs, energy management, water conservation and bailing recyclable materials.

"The improved efficiencies we've achieved have given us a return on investment – that's not the driver, but it's a definite benefit. We're on track to reduce our waste to landfill by 95 per cent this year," Nicholas says.

His plans involve setting up internal and external programmes to educate guests, suppliers and colleagues about awareness of sustainability goals.

Nicholas credits much of his success to his humble dishwasher beginnings: "That gave me a very good grounding in how the hotel works, and an ability to talk to staff at grass roots level," he said.



Greenwashing in the gun

'Greenwashers' beware – the Commerce Commission is on to you.

The Commission is getting tough on false or misleading environmental claims by companies trying to cash in on the growing consumer preference for eco-friendly products and services.

Last month the Commission issued a warning to Wellington Combined Taxis after a complaint that it may have been breaching the Fair Trading Act by publishing false information on its website about fuel efficiency and reducing carbon emissions. The company has said that it accepts the Commission's views, and it has since changed its website.

The Commission's Director of Fair Trading, Adrian Sparrow, said that some companies were "careless" with environmental claims rather than investing in sustainability.

"We have had a look at several complaints, and we anticipate more. Traders have an obligation to put out accurate information, and it's a good idea for consumers to take care as well," he said.

Consumers should not take eco-friendly claims at face value, and where possible look for independent verification of claims made, he said. "If a standard has been drawn up by a wider stakeholder group and has been audited, then obviously it has credence and is worth something."

The Commission would refer cases of deliberate, misleading or deceptive claims for criminal prosecution, Mr Sparrow said. Fines under the Fair Trading Act could be up to \$60,000 for individuals or \$200,000 for companies. Only the courts can decide if a representation has breached the Fair Trading Act, and impose fines.

↘ Firms sign up to Enviro-Mark

Growing public support for environmental sustainability has prompted New Zealand businesses to sign up to the Enviro-Mark@NZ certification programme in ever-larger numbers.

Landcare Research's Environmental Management System (EMS) Programme Manager, Charlie Bartlett, said that the number of programme participants had more than doubled in the past year, from 90 to around 180.

"It used to be a difficult sell, now it's much easier," he said. "Companies are more receptive to doing it. Some of the terminology we have always used, like carbon neutrality and sustainability, is now becoming commonplace."

Landcare Research markets and supports Enviro-Mark@NZ. The programme is a set of self-tools and membership benefits that enables organisations to develop their own EMS.

Enviro-Mark@NZ comprises five steps, starting at Bronze through to Silver, Gold, Platinum and Diamond. Achievement of each step is verified by an external audit, and the highest (Diamond) step also meets the technical requirements of the international standard ISO 14001:2004. "The higher the standard you are aiming for, the more effort you have to put in," Charlie says.

Only eight New Zealand organisations have achieved Enviro-Mark@NZ Diamond status. One of those, Wellington's CatzDesign, has virtually achieved a seemingly implausible goal for a graphic design company – a paperless office.

"It's not hard if you put your mind to it," Catz co-owner Warren Pringle says. "We just do everything on screen. We use about 90 per cent less paper than we used to.

"That impacts on printer cartridges – we last bought one in July '06. We only buy a ream of paper occasionally now," he says.

When Catz was audited for Bronze and Silver certification last year, the auditor advised them to seek Diamond certification.

"From then on it was a case of delving even further into the business, turning us upside down and looking at every facet. Do we really need to use a car? What things can we reduce consuming, what things can we recycle, what can we monitor and show we are reducing our environmental impact?"

So why did they do it? "We are interested in these things, we believe in them," says Warren. "With Enviro-Mark, we can say we are walking the talk, not just paying lip service. It fitted well with what we are trying to achieve personally and professionally."



> On display: EMS Programme Manager Charlie Bartlett (right) and Landcare Research Environmental Consultant Kim Kelleher (centre, facing) talk to a visitor at the Enviro-Mark@NZ display at the Wellington Small Business Expo held last month.



↳ Sustaina-briefs

Lights out for old bulbs in NZ and Australia

Traditional incandescent light bulbs are to be phased out in New Zealand and Australia. New Zealand's old bulbs will be phased out from late next year under the Government's Efficient Lighting Strategy launched on 17 June. Australia has brought forward its planned ban on imported incandescent bulbs – the import ban will now start in November, as part of a four year phase-out of the old bulbs. New Zealand Energy Minister David Parker said that the old light bulbs were very inefficient, converting only five per cent of the energy they use into light, with the rest wasted as heat. "There's a whole new generation of lighting coming through that is more cost-effective, saves energy and is better for the environment," he said. The strategy, jointly developed by the lighting industry, the Energy Efficiency and Conservation Authority, and the Electricity Commission, aims to reduce lighting energy consumption by 20 per cent from 2015. To read the Efficient Lighting Strategy, visit: www.eeca.govt.nz/eeca-library/products/lighting/report/nz-efficient-lighting-strategy-08.pdf



Power saving campaign working

New Zealanders have reduced their power use since the 'Power Savers' television campaign began on 15 June. A week into the campaign, every New Zealand region had achieved savings of between 1.3 and 3.3 per cent, though savings from industrial use had raised that figure to more than 5 per cent, said campaign head and Transpower Chief Executive Dr Patrick Strange. The power industry-funded campaign encourages consumers to turn off appliances like heated towel rails and computers when not in use, and to take shorter showers to save hot water.

Winter heating cutbacks

New Zealanders were cutting back on heating even before the Power Savers campaign began, according to a Research New Zealand poll. When taken in mid-May, the poll showed 64 per cent of respondents were consciously reducing their power use. A further 28 per cent said they were not cutting back, and seven per cent were using non-electricity or non-gas heating sources like wood. The poll covered 500 people nationwide. For tips on how to reduce your power use visit www.sustainability.govt.nz/goal/save-on-power-bill

Green tourism

Tourism businesses are being encouraged to 'Go for Gold' to protect the environment. Gold is the highest of the three new Qualmark enviro-ratings for tourism businesses launched recently. Minimum environmental standards will apply to all Qualmark licence holders from 1 August 2008 as part of their quality accreditation assessments, but tourism businesses will also be able to apply for higher Enviro-Bronze, Enviro-Silver and Enviro-Gold ratings depending on their environmental performance. Tourism New Zealand Chief Executive George Hickton said the natural environment was the main reason visitors came to New Zealand. "We need to protect it and to deliver on the '100% Pure New Zealand' promise we make to our overseas visitors," Mr Hickton said.



Takapuna street light trial

Energy-saving street lamps will be trialled in Takapuna for two years from next month. The trial will establish comparative energy efficiencies and relative costs with traditional sodium vapour lamps. North Shore City Council transport infrastructure group manager Phil Consedine said that rapidly increasing energy costs and sustainability initiatives were behind efforts to introduce greater efficiency into street lighting.

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