

IBM, Coca-Cola, Other Corporations Launch Joint Sustainability Initiative

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By Avery Fellow

IBM, Coca-Cola Co., and several other corporations have formed a focus group to address sustainability challenges related to materials, energy, water, infrastructure, and logistics at their companies.

The Innovations in Environmental Sustainability Council, announced Jan. 17, was created by IBM and the World Environment Center, a nonprofit organization that promotes sustainable development through business practices.

Council members include Boeing, CH2M HILL, the Dow Chemical Co., General Motors, Johnson & Johnson, and the Walt Disney Co.

The companies' chief environmental or sustainability officers or other representatives will meet four times this year to discuss ways to incorporate sustainability into their business practices, according to Wayne Balta, IBM's vice president of corporate environmental affairs and product safety.

Each meeting will focus on a separate theme. The council's first meeting, Feb. 7 and 8 in Orlando, Fla., will focus on sustainability in the supply chain. The meeting will cover "ways in which we can innovate with technology and business processes to better track the existence of materials as they pass through the supply chain," Balta told Bloomberg BNA Jan. 23. The remaining meetings will focus on sustainable infrastructure, water management, and logistics.

"We believe at IBM that game-changing practices in sustainability will be driven by innovation, or looking at challenges and changing the ways that industry has addressed them in a systemic way," Balta said.

IBM Saw Need for Forum

Balta said IBM formed the group as a forum for companies to discuss sustainability challenges. He said IBM partnered with the World Environment Center and informally asked companies about their interest in the initiative. "We wanted to have deep conversations with like-minded companies about systemic innovation," he said.

"They are all demonstrable leaders," Balta said of the group's members. "If you look at these firms, they all have well-recognized, long-standing commitments to operating well, and they are also companies that have a bias towards innovation. They purposely come from diverse industry sectors because that will give us an interesting discussion," he said.

"The challenges our world faces are far too big to be solved by one company, or one technology, or one kind of collaboration," Neil Hawkins, Dow's vice president of sustainability and environment, health, and safety, told Bloomberg BNA in an e-mail statement. "It will take the combined talent, resources, thinking, and collaboration across the value chain, and across the depth and breadth of these global companies, to capture the business value," he said.

Council to Release Report

The meetings will be private, but the group plans to publish a public report about its progress. Balta said the program is currently set up for one year but the discussion could be continued in some form after that.

He said the objective of the council is to "look for ways to innovate—to change the way we actually

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operate.”

“The establishment of the Innovations for Environmental Sustainability Council represents another significant commitment by IBM and other sustainability leaders from the private sector to integrate their innovation and market leadership capabilities with the need to provide solutions to a growing number of challenges facing modern society,” World Environment Center President Terry Yosie said in a statement. “The best practices and value achieved provide great opportunities for implementation on a global scale.”