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*Last Updated: Wednesday, May 17, 2006*

# Wal-Mart 'Greening' Could Have Huge Impact

In a company known more for driving bargains than driving hybrids, I'm frequently asked about the impetus behind the global environmental sustainability programme we launched full-steam at Wal-Mart last year. Like most good stories, this one has evolved over time, involving a bit of personal discovery, organisational enthusiasm and the constant unfurling of the vision before us.

We began talking about the environment among ourselves and with NGOs about 18 months ago. Truthfully, I didn't see how much a retailer could do about the environment beyond recycling and thermostat control, and we had already been doing both. Moreover, Wal-Mart is already known for zealous efficiency: we waste very little in our quest to keep costs down for our customers.

Fortunately, it didn't take long for me to open my eyes to the enormous impact that our company can have on the environment. And it didn't take much longer for my interest in the environment to grow into a full-blown passion. Environmental sustainability may well be the most important initiative we undertake at Wal-Mart this decade, maybe even this century. It will have huge impacts on the way things are made, farmed, packaged, transported, displayed and sold worldwide.

The environmental advantages come straight from our size. As the world's largest retailer, we're in thousands of communities around the USA and 15 other countries. We buy products from more than 60,000 suppliers in 70 countries. We sell anywhere from 35,000 to 100,000 product lines in each of our 6,000-plus stores and clubs. We have 1.7 million associates serving more than 138 million customers every week.

Our size and scale means that even one small proenvironment change in our policies or our customers' habits has exponential impacts all over the world. Consider this: by reducing the size of the cardboard packaging on just one line of our own-brand toys last summer, we saved more than 5,000 trees and 1,300 barrels of oil that would have gone into making the packaging. We also reduced the amount of fuel needed to transport those products to our stores. We use millions of kilos of plastics in shrink-wrap that, until recently, we threw away. Recycling all our plastics at all our US stores (which we'll be doing this year) will keep this plastic out of landfills. Increasing the fuel efficiency of our 7,000-truck fleet will keep tonnes of greenhouse gases out of the air by saving millions of litres of fuel.

We've built environmental 'laboratory' stores in Texas and Colorado, using recycled asphalt, recycled oil for heating, wind and solar power, all innovations we will incorporate into future stores. We've committed to purchasing all our wildcaught fresh and frozen fish for the US market from Marine Stewardship Council-certified sources.

We're buying seven million kilos of organic cotton from Turkey and India, and additional supplies from China, Texas and elsewhere. This policy will keep millions of kilos of chemicals out of the environment. What's more, we will make these organic products more affordable for consumers all around the world, thanks to our large-volume buying and distribution efficiencies. This means that families on a budget will be able to dress their children in organic cotton, and feed them organic vegetables and formula – all at a Wal-Mart price.

These are just a few examples of what's already under way. We are focused on three top-line goals: to be supplied with 100% renewable energy, to create zero waste, and to sell products that sustain our resources and our environment. Those are ambitious goals, but we never think small at our company.

*Article written for Greenpeace Business by Lee Scott, President and CEO, Wal-Mart*

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## Think About This:

Our environmental goals at Wal-Mart are simple and straightforward: To be supplied 100 percent by renewable energy; to create zero waste; and to sell products that sustain our resources and the environment.

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