

## COMPANY INITIATIVE

# Size matters for eco-wary firm

Major garment maker leads the way in setting sustainability standards for big businesses, writes **John Cremer**

**T**here are always exceptions but, in general, the larger a business, the greater the opportunities – and responsibility – to give a decisive lead in areas such as climate change and environmental awareness. The scale of operations, resources available and staff numbers create the chance and obligation to act and educate in ways that other organisations can only contemplate.

Recognising that, Hong Kong-based TAL Apparel, a major manufacturer of shirts and garments for many of the world's best-known clothing brands and fashion retailers, last year adopted a clearly defined two-pronged strategy.

One part looks at promoting sustainability and cutting consumption "within our own four walls", a description that includes 10 plants in five countries across Asia, employing roughly 20,000 workers.

The other, in alliance with some of the biggest corporate names in the apparel, footwear and retail sectors, is to

set new benchmarks and agree best practices for progressive implementation around the world.

"Internally, there are 10 things we are asking the company to achieve in three years," says Delman Lee, president and chief technology officer of TAL Apparel, outlining plans for a more sustainable manufacturing process and reducing greenhouse gas emissions by at least 15 per cent. "People may say it's too little, but it is an initial target to get the interest going and improve understanding in



TAL is making an investment for the future by using energy efficient LED lights, among other eco-friendly initiatives.

the different countries of what climate change is."

Specific measures include putting custom-designed insulation around machines, installing LED lights, and using infrared cameras to identify "hot spots" in factories where energy can be saved. There is also extra focus on better waste water treatment, recycling of fabric scraps, and using localised meters to monitor and cut power consumption for individual processes.

"Some of it is very basic stuff we should all do, but which we didn't do so well previously," Lee says.

To be methodical, the company does careful testing and checks the benefits of change at one plant before introducing it at others. A framework and management system developed with the help of WWF Hong Kong, an environmental group, provides a basis for certification and a method to

measure actual carbon footprints. And the newest factory in Vietnam is being built in line with internationally recognised Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design standards, incorporating the most environmentally friendly practices.

"We realise that education of the workforce is also very important, so each plant has a social responsibility committee as part of the overall effort," Lee says. "They run awareness programmes explaining climate change and why the greenhouse effect is a [pressing] issue for everyone."

To emphasise that, the company has joined the Sustainable Apparel Coalition, an international grouping of major players intent on addressing environmental concerns that affect the whole industry. The aim is to study the full supply chain – from cotton growers through weaving, manufacturing,

transport, retailing and consumer usage – and come up with an index to measure and benchmark sustainable practices for each step of a product's life cycle.

A pilot index should be ready later this year providing metrics for energy, fuel and water usage, giving guidelines and, perhaps, setting targets.

In due course, companies may be awarded a "label" confirming involvement in the scheme and their commitment to environmental principles. "Definitely, there is a process to go through to come to consensus, but I can see all the participants are very keen to get some practical tools out to the supply chain," Lee says.

Has your company launched an innovative corporate social responsibility initiative that you would like to share with our readers? Write in and tell us about it at: [editor@classifiedpost.com](mailto:editor@classifiedpost.com)

## job central

## Companies raise bar for top staff

The increasingly challenging business environment has led companies to set higher standards for senior-level positions.

"Companies are looking for result-oriented individuals who are flexible, proactive and able to work in a team," says Alexa Chow, managing director of Centaline Human Resources Consultants, a subsidiary of real estate firm Centaline. "They should also be sensitive to the [macro] environment and have a strong business sense."

As the market picked up after the Lunar New Year, many openings have materialised for professionals who wish to change career paths or work for another company.

Centaline Human Resources Consultants is looking to fill positions for its clients, including assistant company secretarial manager for a listed company, corporate finance director, property manager, director of risk management and senior marketing communications manager.

Candidates should have a degree in a relevant field and solid working experience. Those applying for senior positions are required to have more than 10 years of related experience, while assistant managerial roles require three to five years' experience, Chow says.

Individuals who are willing to be stationed outside Hong Kong may consider the roles of senior merchandising manager and factory general manager, to be based in Dongguan, Guangdong province.

"Language skills are important for these positions," Chow says. "Candidates must be fluent in English, Cantonese and Putonghua." *Ana Wang*

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## EDITOR'S NOTE

The Read to Succeed article on HR lessons from Fortune 100 Best Companies has been postponed to next week. Apologies for the inconvenience.