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**Business leaders are discovering that sustainable practices are essential to meeting the demands of increasingly environmentally savvy stakeholders - and boosting the bottom line.**

by *Samantha Putt Del Pino*

In the past few years, a change has occurred in how businesses, big and small, approach environmental concerns. Business leaders are discovering that sustainable practices are essential to meeting the demands of increasingly environmentally savvy stakeholder, and can boost their bottom lines, as well.

Since 1982, my organization, the World Resources Institute (WRI), has researched environmental issues and advised organizations ranging from Fortune 500 companies to small enterprises in developing countries about sound environmental business strategies.

Becoming one of the expert non-profit organizations that companies seek for advice has been a challenging but interesting road. Several years ago, my colleagues and I began to research ways to combat rising greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions that are at the root of the growing global warming crisis. Understanding that organizations of all sizes contribute to these emissions, we were not content with simply devising strategies for others. We wanted WRI to “walk the talk,” and put its recommended approaches to energy and GHG-emissions management into practice.

Even though WRI is not considered a traditional polluter—with smokestacks or factories—like many other service-oriented companies, it does produce GHG emissions through the heating, lighting and cooling of its office building; the energy used to power its computers; and the fuel used every time an employee hops on an airplane to meet with a partner, or rides the train to work.

Sound energy management is the key to reducing GHG emissions, and WRI quickly discovered that it could implement a number of



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energy-saving ideas ranging from no-cost to some-cost, with an eventual payback. To start, when we moved to a new building in 1999, the space was configured to maximize use of natural daylight; energy-efficient appliances and lighting were purchased; and motion sensors were installed to make sure that energy was not wasted on lighting empty rooms. Staffers are encouraged to use the organization's in-house video-conferencing equipment to replace some airplane trips. Also, we worked with our landlord to ensure that 100 percent of our electricity was "greened-up" with clean, renewable sources like the wind.

In 2000, WRI's Washington, D.C., headquarters was recognized as one of the top 10 most responsibly designed buildings by the American Institute of Architects. This year, we are expanding our office space, and will apply for Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design (LEED) Commercial Interiors certification. We're also working with our landlords at the American Psychological Association to plan and install a green roof.

Many of these activities are saving our organization money—essential for a non-profit—and all of them reduced WRI's contribution to GHG emissions. But there was only one way to be certain that we were reducing emissions: by regularly measuring them and tracking our progress over time.

Regular GHG measurement and reporting is a critical activity for any business that wants to effectively manage its GHG emissions. At the time, there was no standardized tool that companies could use, so WRI set about the task of developing one. To accomplish this, we teamed up with the World Business Council for Sustainable Development (WBCSD), based in Geneva, Switzerland. Over a span of several years, WRI, WBCSD, dozens of businesses, other non-profits, expert individuals and government agencies worked to create the "GHG Protocol Corporate Accounting and Reporting Standard." The standard is somewhat akin to Generally Accepted Accounting Standards, except it measures GHG emissions. It is now used by hundreds of companies around the world and underpins numerous voluntary and mandatory GHG programs. We apply the GHG Protocol standard to our own annual measurement of GHG emissions and publicly report the results annually on our Web site. Each year, after calculating our emissions and pursuing activities to reduce them, we purchase carbon offsets so that our annual emissions balance is zero.

We synthesized much of our research and experience to help our office and other companies we partner with to become more climate-friendly in a pair of recently released WRI guidebooks. *Hot Climate, Cool Commerce: A Service Sector Guide to Greenhouse Gas Management* is tailored specifically to non-industrial companies, and details the various steps necessary to manage, track and reduce GHG emissions. In another new publication, *Switching to Green: A Renewable Energy Guide for Office and Retail Companies*, we break down the often-confusing

process of buying renewable energy into five easy steps.

WRI's ongoing work with the business community is exciting. We're working with numerous Fortune 500 companies across the country on strategies to help them prosper in a carbon-constrained world. Activities include building the business case for corporate action on climate change; developing GHG inventories; and exploring emissions-reduction solutions, such as investment and deployment of clean energy technologies.

*Samantha Putt del Pino is a project manager in the Climate and Energy Program at the World Resources Institute in Washington, D.C. ([www.wri.org](http://www.wri.org)). Putt del Pino works with the private sector on corporate responses to climate change. She also manages WRI's organizational commitment to "walk the talk" by measuring and reducing its carbon footprint.*

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