

SC Johnson's 2006 Public Report

Leadership in action but not reporting

By Aleksandra Dobkowski-Joy

A disappointing report from SC Johnson

SC Johnson has earned a reputation as a sustainability leader with its forward-thinking materials programmes, base-of-pyramid activities and progressive workplace policies. Unfortunately the company's leadership does not extend to corporate responsibility reporting.

Striking a self-aggrandising tone, SC Johnson's 2006 Public Report lists endless advancements, awards, achievements and commendations while neglecting to disclose challenges, criticisms, or comprehensive goals and targets.

Products centre stage

The report is built around four issue platforms: using earth-responsible raw materials, advancing social progress and public health, preventing insect-borne diseases, and reducing energy consumption and greenhouse gases. All of the platforms link directly to SC Johnson's universe of instantly recognizable brands, including Raid, Pledge, Oust, Saran wrap, Drano, OFF! and Windex.

SC Johnson works hard to associate product use with increased health (especially in the case of insect-borne diseases), cleanliness, and convenience. Indeed, the company's programmes to fight malaria in Ghana demonstrate the acute need for effective insecticides and mosquito management techniques to combat infection, illness, and death.

Yet many environmentally minded consumers shy away from the company's products, scared off by labels listing extensive warnings and toxic ingredients. Recognising this, SC Johnson devotes a quarter of its report to describing efforts to reformulate products to retain effectiveness while reducing environmental harm and risk to consumer health and safety.

SC Johnson's flagship reformulation programme, the now-patented Greenlist, has been under development since 2001. Company scientists rank raw ingredients from zero to three in order of increasing environmental desirability. A zero ranking denotes a "restricted" ingredient that can be used only if there are no comparable alternatives.

The company's tracked raw materials currently score a combined 1.41, up from 1.12 in 2000-01. Pull-

out boxes illustrate progress; for example, the introduction of a new solvent into the company's Windex glass cleaner led to a 1.8 million pound (weight) reduction in the use of volatile organic compounds while increasing cleaning effectiveness by 30%.

While trend information is provided, future Greenlist goals are conspicuously missing. Also, although SC Johnson plans to license Greenlist at no cost to other companies wishing to reduce their environmental footprint, the report does not provide information as to how interested parties can gain Greenlist access.

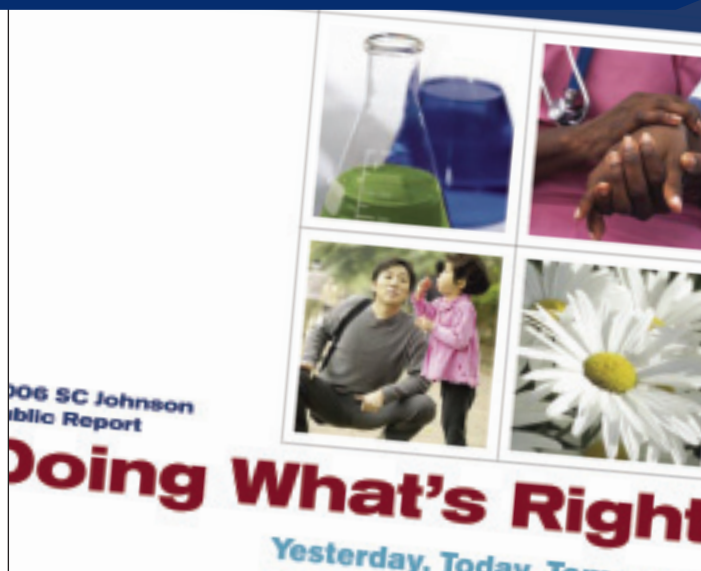
Missing goals

SC Johnson's report suffers throughout from this type of imprecision. Programme descriptions list past achievements but most objectives and targets cut off at 2005. In fact, the metrics summary states: "SC Johnson has met or exceeded its reduction goals for emissions, fossil fuels, and greenhouse gases." Though laudable in terms of the hard work required to meet existing goals, this phrasing implies that no further action is necessary or planned.

The report also purports to follow GRI guidelines, stating: "All data provided in this report is in accordance with the Global Reporting Initiative Guidelines." A content index is, however, nowhere to be found either in the print version or on SC Johnson's website.

Stakeholder viewpoints that extend beyond employee profiles and glowing testimonials from sustainability luminaries are likewise missing. Though SC Johnson uses the report to publicise its "Do What's Right" website (basically an online version of the report), the site is a one-way information avenue rather than a true platform for engagement.

In short, SC Johnson has produced an incomplete communications piece, missing vital discussion of ongoing challenges, frank recognition of the unsustainability of many of its products, and meaningful stakeholder input. With its approach to the 2006 Public Report verging on narcissistic self-promotion, SC Johnson misses the opportunity to benefit from the reflective self-assessment that is at the centre of a first-class reporting process. ■



Snapshot: the SC Johnson 2006 Public Report

Follows GRI? Yes, but provides no content index.

Assured? No

Targets? Some

Stakeholder input? No

Seeks feedback? No

Key strengths: Organisation around four platforms.

Chief weaknesses: No discussion of challenges, no stakeholder input.

Pleasant surprises: Quick reference guide for metrics, online videos featuring employee perspectives.

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Useful links:

www.scjohnson.com/pro6/documents/pr2006.pdf
www.dowhatsright.com
www.conservation.org