

Posted on Wed, Nov. 16, 2005

Finding profitable ways to fight global warming CITIES, COMPANIES COMBINE SAVINGS WITH CUTTING EMISSIONS

Mercury News Editorial

When a coalition of Silicon Valley businesses, public agencies and environmental groups banded together to find ways to cut carbon dioxide emissions some 20 months ago, they hoped to prove a point: that doing the right thing for the environment can be good for the bottom line.

The first results from their efforts are in, and they are promising.

Through innovative use of technology, alternative energy and common sense, members of Sustainable Silicon Valley have cut their total energy consumption, reduced their emissions of greenhouse gases, which contribute to global warming, and slashed their energy bills. The organization, which was set up in part by the Silicon Valley Leadership Group, includes HP, Lockheed, Oracle, Calpine and other companies; the cities of San Jose and Palo Alto; Santa Clara County; a local chapter of the Sierra Club; and other groups.

Cisco, for instance, made changes to its buildings, modified lighting and streamlined maintenance and operations to cut its carbon dioxide emissions by 23 million pounds each year. That's the equivalent of removing 2,300 cars from the valley's roads. In the process, Cisco saved \$4.5 million in yearly operating costs.

Alza Corp., a unit of Johnson & Johnson based in Mountain View, is using methane from a closed landfill near Shoreline Amphitheatre to generate electricity, reducing carbon dioxide emissions by 7,000 tons each year. And energy-management software and other efficiency measures have saved Palo Alto \$17,000 in annual energy costs and San Jose more than \$13 million since 2001.

These businesses and government agencies, along with other members of Sustainable Silicon Valley, are leading by example. (Incidentally, they've implemented the kinds of technological and behavioral changes that Gov. Schwarzenegger is promoting in China.) Through this initiative, they've done a service to our environment and quality of life by saving enough energy to power more than 233,500 homes for one year.

The group has not made much progress toward one of its long-term and most ambitious goals: to reduce the valley's carbon dioxide emissions to 20 percent below 1990 levels by 2010. In fact, with a recovering economy and growing energy use, overall carbon dioxide emissions were up more than 2 percent in 2004. That's not entirely surprising. Sustainable Silicon Valley members are a tiny fraction of the valley's overall energy users, and half of the valley's carbon dioxide emissions come from cars.

But Sustainable Silicon Valley members are proving that doing what's right for the environment can be good for business. And if others in the region join them, or simply emulate their efforts, Silicon Valley could make a small contribution toward deflecting the growing global-warming crisis.

© 2005 MercuryNews.com and wire service sources. All Rights Reserved.
<http://www.mercurynews.com>