

COMMITTED TO GOING GREEN: NIKE Adopts The Natural Step

With more than 3,000 retail products on the market and 22,000 employees worldwide, Nike's reach is extensive and their environmental efforts significant. Today the company is turning used sneakers into playgrounds, eliminating toxic glues and solvents from its packaging and footwear manufacturing processes, continuously researching and employing ecologically sound materials and processes, reducing its dependence on non-renewable resources, greening the supply chain, and growing the demand for environmentally responsible products and technologies. Now Nike is ready to strengthen the foundation of these efforts, and is using The Natural Step framework as its compass.

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In February 1993, the Nike Environmental Action Team (N.E.A.T.) was established and charged with directing and coordinating Nike's global environmental programs. Since that time, N.E.A.T. has inspired initiatives such as the "Reuse-A-Shoe" program that reclaims worn and defective footwear and grinds them into granulated rubber used for sports surfaces and carpet padding, and so far has kept 7.5 million shoes out of landfills. The company has saved \$4.5 million dollars and 1.3 million gallons of solvent by substituting water-based adhesives for petroleum-based solvents in nine out of ten of its shoe designs. By downsizing from eighteen to two different shoe box styles, both constructed of 100 percent post-consumer corrugated cardboard, Nike saves a half a million trees a year and is increasing the demand for environmentally responsible packaging.

Sarah Severn, Global Director of N.E.A.T., first heard about The Natural Step in 1994 in an article featuring TNS/US Founder Paul Hawken. Since that time, TNS has become a core element of Nike's environmental initiatives. As N.E.A.T. introduced the TNS framework to its product design team they began working closely with McDonough Braungart Design Chemistry, an established Virginia-based sustainable product and process design team. Together they are working to decrease Nike's dependence on harmful chemicals and to create ways of recovering and eliminating waste from manufacturing operations, and will be identifying a list of ecologically sound materials and processes.

At the same time, Nike's Labor Practices, Global Community Affairs, and Environmental Action Teams united under the direction of a new Vice President of Corporate Responsibility, Maria Eitel, in an effort to address the interconnectedness of social and environmental issues. Six months ago, senior management approved N.E.A.T.'s corporate sustainability policy, rooted in the principles of The Natural Step, and launched the new policy at a rally this fall. TNS education began nearly one month later with some of Nike's key product designers and materials experts learning about the importance of understanding the life-cycle implications of

materials and how to view products as an ongoing stream of services. After intensive brainstorming and discussions, it became clear to the group that at the heart of their challenge is finding ways to preserve the integrity of Nike's products while operating within the parameters of The Natural Step system conditions.

Today at Nike, The Natural Step framework is regarded as "rules for the earth." The company is committed to making the principles of The Natural Step a common language and mental model for all 22,000 Nike employees. TNS is the foundation of N.E.A.T.'s biggest objective for the next fiscal year — Nike's Sustainability Integration Initiative. The team is in the process of developing a sustainability framework for the entire company that will integrate the principles of TNS, systems thinking, and organizational learning.



Nike's vision is ultimately to be able to assure its customers that all the materials in its products will have the capacity to be reused, either in another industrial cycle or one of nature's cycles. The company's mission statement embodies the ideals of sustainable enterprise and focuses on creating closed-loop systems by eliminating waste, developing "cradle to cradle" product life cycles, and recognizing the value of employee learning and capacity-building. All of Nike's environmental innovations so far have come from its own staff, and their accomplishments demonstrate the impact a team of committed individuals can have inside a large corporation. Nike recognizes there is a long road ahead, and with The Natural Step as their guide, N.E.A.T. is striving to encourage and empower everyone involved with their business — employees, subcontractors, vendors, and customers — to join them and participate in their journey toward sustainability. 🌱

by Jill Rosenblum, TNS Staff

For more information about Nike's environmental initiatives visit www.nikebiz.com. The Natural Step US is proud to welcome Sarah Severn to our Board of Directors. Since the inception of TNS US, Sarah has greatly contributed to the advancement of TNS throughout the Northwest and will be an active participant in this year's Natural Step Annual Workshop.