

Zero Waste Goal: A one-minute primer

What does it mean when a company says it is working towards a “zero waste goal”?

By stating a “zero waste goal” companies are committing to a continuous improvement approach to eliminating waste across the value chain from product design to disposal.

The *Zero Waste* concept focuses on a whole systems or life-cycle approach to minimizing waste. The actual waste factor is incorporated into the product design/sourcing stage. This optimizes a product’s design in order to eliminate waste to landfill at the end of the product’s life. The optimized product design strives for reduced materials used, use of recycled materials in the product, use of less harmful ingredients, longer product lives, potential secondary uses and recyclability.

Who is working towards “zero waste”?

Examples of companies that adopted some form of this principle include Seventh Generation, Nestlé, Unilever, Coca-Cola, Ikea, Mars, Cadbury-Schweppes, Xerox, Canadian Tire and InterfaceFLOR.

Among many great examples, here is a selection of Zero Waste commitments:

- **Xerox** launched a new return and recycling program to recover more toner and supplies for reuse. Their solid ink imaging process utilizes compact “cartridge-free” solid ink sticks with no plastic housings or casings, thereby reducing print-related waste by up to 90% compared with comparable color laser products.¹
- **Seventh Generation** is minimizing packaging and eliminating harmful products, while ensuring that the end product is recyclable. In terms of product design, they use a product scorecard to measure impacts and performance across various criteria (environmental, health, costs). All product boxes and boxes for outer packaging are now 100% postconsumer recycled (with two exceptions) and they have introduced a 96% postconsumer resin bottle.²
- **Walmart** also diverts about 60% of waste from landfill across its stores at this time and has a goal of eliminating landfill waste from their U.S. operations by 2025 (2008 baseline).³
- **Canadian Tire** is focused on developing and implementing a packaging and waste reduction strategy (working with vendors), which includes reducing the packaging in their house brands. Over 1,800 employees are also working towards a zero waste designation for the Home Office location in Toronto. CT is also working on waste diversion from landfill at Toronto-area distribution centres.⁴

- **Mountain Equipment Co-op** has an ultimate goal of converting all oil-based polyester garments to 100% recycled content and is working through challenges of availability, performance and price of materials.⁵
- **RONA** has a recovery program for consumers taking back paint, batteries, compact fluorescent light bulbs, and power tool accessories as well as a proactive approach to the recycling of plastic and paper waste from stores. In 2009 a pilot project involving big-box stores in the Montreal area began recycling other products including wood, gypsum, steel and concrete.⁶
- **Nestlé** Continuous Excellence program enabled their factories to reduce water per tonne of product by 3.1% and increase reuse or recovery of by products by 4.2% in 2010.⁷
- **InterfaceFLOR** has made it their mission to achieve a zero environmental footprint by 2020, and their strategy includes take back and reuse of their carpets. Detailed information about their robust approach is available at their website.⁸
- **The Co-operators** has also stated working towards zero waste is part of their operational commitment to sustainability – one of the four components of their sustainability strategy.⁹

For more information on how to integrate zero waste into your CSR strategy, please contact your Advisor or a CBSR office through www.cbsr.ca or 604.323.2714, 403.219.3216 or 416.703.7435.

1 <http://www.xerox.com/corporate-citizenship-2010/sustainability/waste-prevention.html>

2 <http://www.seventhgeneration.com/mission/environmental-footprint/packaging>

3 <http://bit.ly/fxZEiW>

4 http://corp.canadiantire.ca/EN/CSR/CTC_Report2010/cta_popup_english.html
<http://corp.canadiantire.ca/EN/CSR/Pages/default.aspx>

5
http://www.mec.ca/Main/content_text.jsp?CONTENT%3C%3Ecnt_id=10134198674099406&FOLDER%3C%3Efolder_id=2534374302887302

6 <http://www.rona.ca/rona/img/ATTACHMENT1301410577607.pdf>

7
<http://www.nestle.com/CSV/WaterAndEnvironmentalSustainability/WasteAndRecovery/Pages/WasteAndRecovery.aspx>

8 <http://www.interfaceflor.com/default.aspx?section=3&sub=4>

9 http://www.cooperators.ca/en/aboutus/sustainability/2_8_1.html