

## **Wal-Mart developing worldwide sustainability index**

July 17 -- Wal-Mart Stores Inc. wants to give customers an easy system to rate the sustainability of the products they buy.

The Bentonville, Ark.-based mega-retailer is working with its suppliers to develop a worldwide sustainable product index. It announced the plan during a July 16 meeting at its headquarters with 1,500 of its suppliers.

Wal-Mart hopes to rate the sustainability of its products from raw materials to disposal to give its customers what they want -- to know the materials in the products are safe and that they were made in a responsible way, said Mike Duke, Wal-Mart president and CEO.

"Customers want products that are more efficient, that last longer and perform better," he said. "And, increasingly, they want information about the entire lifecycle of a product so they can feel good about buying it."

Wal-Mart plans to introduce the initiative in three phases. First, it will survey its more than 100,000 suppliers worldwide, asking them 15 questions to evaluate their own sustainability efforts in four areas: energy and climate, material efficiency, natural resources, and people and community. It will ask its top-tier U.S. suppliers to complete the survey by Oct. 1 and will develop timelines on a country-by-country basis for the rest of its vendors.

The second step will include creating a consortium of universities that will collaborate with suppliers, retailers, nongovernmental organizations and government to develop a global database on the lifecycle of products from cradle to grave.

Finally, it wants to translate that information into a simple sustainable product rating system for its customers.

"We do not see this as a trend that will fade," Duke said. "Higher customer expectations are a permanent part of the future."

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