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TAKING ACTION ON CLIMATE CHANGE

G4S commits to a global programme that will reduce its impact on the environment

SOME OF THE scenarios being suggested for the future of our planet are truly scary. The experts making these predictions describe a future world in which extremes of weather will cause widespread devastation and rising sea levels will result in extensive flooding and the disappearance of coastal land and even cities.

These events will also have a huge effect on agriculture, causing food shortages that could lead to civil unrest or even wars.

The questions scientists have been asking for a decade or more are: "Why is this happening?" and "What can we do to stop it?"

Most have come to the same conclusions. Global warming, caused by human activity, is changing the environment. And since the human race has caused the problem, it needs to take actions that will reduce the impact for future generations.

There are sceptics who say these forecasts are nonsense and that global warming is just a cyclical phenomenon with which the Earth and its inhabitants must learn to live. The problem with that argument is that if we do nothing in the hope that they are right, and then they prove to be wrong, it will be too late to turn back the clock.

This is not a time to prevaricate. Action is needed now, particularly by reducing carbon emissions, in the hope that the environment can be protected and preserved for the benefit of all species on our planet. That effort is necessary at an individual level – we can all make a difference in a variety of ways – and at a national level, with governments reaching international agreement on a programme of reduction and finding less harmful alternatives for the power we need.

Corporations can also play an important role in creating change and G4S – the world's leading provider of secure solutions with operations in over 110 countries – recognises that its business activities have a direct and indirect impact on the natural environment.

That is why G4S is putting its full weight, in partnership with a leading environmental consultancy, behind a global Climate Action Programme designed not only to manage that impact in a proactive way but also to increase awareness among employees, customers and suppliers about the need to conserve the planet's vital resources.

It began with an ambitious "trailblazer" programme focusing initially on a representative sample of the Group – its cash solutions operations and the seven largest of its secure solutions businesses – and the impact they had on the environment during 2007.

The trailblazers' purpose was to test G4S's ability to identify and accurately measure the amount of carbon emissions coming from buildings over which it has operational control, as well as from its vehicle fleet and employee business air travel.

The exercise was viewed as a success and proved the business case for measuring and reducing its carbon emissions. A Climate Action Board then appointed a network of regional and national environmental coordinators to implement the Group's strategy and broaden the scope of its programme.

During 2008, G4S's carbon footprint analysis measurement was based on businesses representing half a million employees and over 22,000 vehicles across 37 countries – about 82 per cent of the Group's global operations. It equated to 450,000 tonnes of carbon dioxide equivalent (CO₂e) emissions, over 70 per cent of which was generated by its vehicle fleet, including the large armoured cash vehicles which have heavy emissions.

Energy usage in offices and other buildings accounts for over 20 per cent of G4S's carbon footprint – providing another opportunity to make reductions.

With G4S's growth, that carbon footprint will expand proportionately, so an average measurement of 90 tonnes of CO₂e per £1m of revenue has been established.

The Group's objective is to reduce carbon emissions →

and measure the carbon footprint for at least 90 per cent of the businesses which will embrace G4S Care & Justice facilities for the first time, including prisons which are high energy users.

The target is an annual 4.5 per cent drop in carbon intensity between 2009 and 2012. Actions that will help achieve this target will include not only looking at alternative fuels for transportation fleets but also improvements in fuel consumption through better driving and route management techniques.

Employee awareness, in particular, is being encouraged by a programme called "The Big Think", and that covers not only energy usage and conservation but also increased recycling of materials and reducing waste.

In July, G4S's regional environmental coordinators met in London to share their experiences and discuss

ways of improving their results. They learned from Richard Hawkins, Group security director (G4S Cash Solutions) and Climate Action Board chairman, and Nigel Lockwood, G4S communications manager and Group environmental manager, that although only five months had elapsed since they began measuring virtually the entire

Group's carbon footprint, G4S has already caught up with companies that have been doing so for years.

As well as being beneficial for the planet, in the long-term there's another good reason for G4S reducing its carbon footprint. Using less fuel or more economical energy sources and reducing waste will save the Group money, so the Climate Action Programme will eventually be self-funding.

However, it wasn't lost on the delegates that their very presence in London for the two-day workshop had, ironically, also contributed to the Group's carbon footprint. Nigel Lockwood even knew the impact of their global travel: some 19 tonnes of CO₂ had been expended to get them to their destination.

The good news, as one would expect from a company so dedicated to reducing its impact on the environment, is that G4S has offset that impact, like many other individuals and corporations, through a scheme that invests in projects that do as much good for the environment as the harm their carbon emissions cause. So the one cancels out the other.

In the future, the Group will be looking at using technology – such as video conferencing – as an alternative to air travel to enable employees in different countries to "meet" and communicate.

In situations where pollution cannot be avoided and environmental damage becomes inevitable, offsetting projects can provide an opportunity to rectify it and are one option which G4S is considering.

But the best option is to produce results with positive action and, fortunately, a growing number of individuals and companies, like G4S, are accepting that they have a moral responsibility to do so. ■

