

Humanscale Charts a Clear Path to Sustainable Future

December 23 & 30, 2020



A new annual Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) Report from Humanscale reveals a clear and charted path toward truly sustainable design and manufacturing.

As the changes to our natural environment become more apparent, evidenced by the significant increase in wildfires and hurricanes in 2020, Humanscale recognizes the imperative for manufacturers to reform their practices for better environmental outcomes. The company has long held a steadfast commitment, driven by CEO and Founder Bob King, to achieve a net-positive environmental impact. Believing that less bad is not good enough, King and Chief Sustainability Officer Jane Abernethy have spearheaded a comprehensive program to design and manufacture ergonomic workspace solutions with a fundamental regard for the planet and its resources. From operations and product development to companywide initiatives and individual actions, Humanscale's detailed 2019 CSR report outlines the company's goal to achieve a net positive environmental impact and offers a roadmap to other manufacturers ready to join in the mission.

"Like a drop in the ocean, every decision we make creates a ripple effect far beyond our backyard," King said. "We, and all manufacturers, must aim to make that impact a positive one."

Healthy materials and transparency

Humanscale has long committed to the elimination of Red-List chemicals, which are often found in coatings, finishes and additives, for the health of its customers and the health of the natural environment and global community. Given the current climate, consumer health and well-being are more important than ever before, as millions of people are working from home, thus bringing workplace products into their spaces. A material like vinyl, for instance, is not toxic during use but is toxic during manufacturing and disposal. This recycling is almost exclusively done in poor communities in Africa and Asia where vinyl is often burned off, filling the air with potent carcinogens. Humanscale has opted to use polyurethane instead of vinyl in almost all of its products despite the higher cost. In 2019 Humanscale completely eliminated Chrome 6 from all of its products. Its goal for 2020 is to eliminate any remaining PFC stain-resistant coatings and halogenated flame retardants (HFRs) from its product line.

"Knowing what our products are made of is important for a few reasons," Abernethy said. "It allows people to make educated purchasing decisions before introducing a potentially harmful chemical into their home or office. It inherently incentivizes manufacturers to improve their

products by removing chemicals of concern. And with the growing adoption of such transparency, the industry and consumers advocate for further research around the impacts of specific chemicals - a win for us all.”

Resources and waste

With four manufacturing facilities around the world, Humanscale continuously examines its impacts on a local and global scale. Its global waste diversion rate was 86.9% for 2019. Looking ahead, Humanscale is working toward a rate of 90% waste diversion, a 5% reduction of cardboard and aiming to eliminate single use packaging for one product. Rainwater reuse systems continue to play a key role in reducing Humanscale’s overall resource consumption. With rainwater collection already in use at its Piscataway, New Jersey, facility, the company funded and designed a rainwater reuse system for its Dublin facility in 2019 and is conducting feasibility studies to implement a rainwater reuse system at its Nogales facility in Mexico.

Climate and energy

Using cloud-based software, Humanscale is able to routinely examine its energy use and identify areas where it can reduce consumption based on data. Since 2011, Humanscale has met its goal to reach a 10% normalized energy reduction over its baseline year. Since its installation, solar energy provided enough electricity to run the brand’s Piscataway facility for 1,538 days. The brand aims to update this energy reduction goal in 2020 using science-based targets.

Social responsibility

At Humanscale, the aim to achieve a net positive impact extends into meaningful initiatives driven by employees. Humanscale’s internal team of sustainability ambassadors doubled in size in 2019 and represents 12 countries. The group’s initial tasks - to inspire other Humanscale’s employees to incorporate sustainability into everyday practices - now reaches the brand’s clients and industry partners who have implemented their own respective initiatives that help offset carbon footprints and ultimately replenish the environment. In 2019, Humanscale sustainability ambassadors gave more than 500 presentations to audiences, including architecture and design firms and end users. Building on this momentum, Humanscale’s goal for 2020 is to partner with like-minded organizations on a positive impact project and to audit 80% of its suppliers for sustainability and social impacts.

Wildlife preservation

It’s more critical than ever to protect and preserve natural environments so biodiversity can thrive. Not always a focus among manufacturers, Humanscale recognizes the impact of manufacturing globally and cultivates a longstanding relationship with the World Wildlife Foundation, engaging in 10-plus years of conservation work as part of a program that aims to restore and protect a 15-million acre area home to endangered and indigenous species. Healthy oceans are also a primary focus for the brand. After the success of its Smart Ocean chair, which uses almost 2 pounds of fishing nets in its design to help eliminate the most harmful type of ocean plastic,

Humanscale is planning to develop another product that leverages this innovative design model for cleaner oceans.

Demonstrating environmental leadership

An established leader in sustainable manufacturing, Humanscale underscored its influence in 2019 through numerous activations and initiatives. Early in the year, it hosted leaders from other companies, including Dell, GM, Herman Miller, IKEA, Interface, HP, Loreal and others, at its New York headquarters to discuss the impact of plastic pollution, policies and material innovation through the Next Wave Initiative, of which it is a founding member. The company also put its innovative thinking and research on display at the XXII Triennale di Milano, showcasing new sustainable design concepts as part of the Broken Nature: Design Takes on Human Survival exhibit curated by Paola Antonelli. Also a leader in material transparency, Humanscale had 30 Declare Labels for its products in 2019; 32% of all labels published in the furniture industry.

Humanscale’s leadership continues into 2020. In 2016 it was the first-ever manufacturer to achieve complete Living Product Challenge Certification, the most rigorous sustainability certification for product design, for not one, but two products. This year, it is renewing the original certifications and expanding its commitment. In 2020, the company will expand to certify 25 Living Products.