

monitored waste processing companies by visiting the site and checking their waste processing methods to stop illegal processing and illegal shipping of waste. Likewise, recognising the risks of waste water discharge and its impact on the environment, Samsung promoted ecosystem restoration projects and water conservation activities in its domestic as well as overseas operation sites. Further, Samsung implemented the 'Eco-Design Assessment process' through which environmental impact assessment at the product development stage became a mandatory requirement. Likewise the 'Eco-Design System (EDS)' enabled the execution of an 'Eco-Product Rating Program' for assessing the green attributes of each development project.

THE ROAD AHEAD

In recognition of Samsung's green management practices, four of Samsung's products received Eco Design awards at the Consumer Electronics Show (CES) 2012.⁵³ Samsung received the Energy Star Partner of the Year award by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA).⁵⁴ Moreover, the China Europe International Business School (CEBIS) identified Samsung as one of the 100 green foreign companies operating in China.⁵⁵ In spite of all its achievements, Samsung's practices were criticised by some organisations. Reports revealed that Samsung had violated labour rights and health rights of employees and was involved in environmental violations. In some of its production units, Samsung was said to have neglected unsafe working conditions, employed children as labourers, and illegally dumped hazardous waste.⁵⁶

Moreover, in its sustainability report of 2011, Samsung mentioned that it had removed all brominated flame retardants (BFRs) and polyvinyl chloride (PVCs) from its mobile phones and several other products. However, Public Eye, which was a Switzerland based whistle-blower organisation and was organised by Greenpeace, emphasised that they had found certain cancer-causing solvents in some random samples and that Samsung had not disclosed information regarding 10 of 83 chemicals.⁵⁷ Further, Public Eye, whose objective was to criticise global businesses that operated with a profit motive and neglected their social responsibilities, claimed that Samsung "uses banned and highly-toxic substances in its factories, without informing

and/or protecting its workers . . . Samsung has a history of over 50 years of environmental pollution, trade union repression, corruption and tax flight."⁵⁸ Furthermore, while Public Eye accused Samsung of around 140 cases of cancer as well as 50 deaths due to unsafe working conditions, it argued that its no-union policy covered the truth and obstructed investigation of the cases.⁵⁹

Meanwhile, there were accusations that toxics were found in the cleaning rooms in Samsung facilities.⁶⁰ Worker groups in South Korea reported many cases of brain cancer and other serious diseases such as leukemia and lymphoma. Employees working at Samsung's semiconductor units and other chemically-intensive manufacturing units became victims of such diseases.⁶¹ The occurrence of cancer among Samsung's employees was tracked by Dr. Jeong-ok Kong (Kong), an occupational health physician who worked for the Korea Institute of Labor Safety and Health (KILSH) and other non-profit organisations. Kong reported that most of the employees who were afflicted with serious diseases worked in Samsung's semiconductor plants.⁶² These findings were reiterated by Supporters of Health and Rights of People in the Semiconductor Industry⁶³ (SHARPS).⁶⁴ However the accusations and the findings of the reports were rejected by Samsung officials. Reuben Staines (Staines), member of Samsung's corporate communications team in Seoul, was quoted as saying, "Samsung maintains a world-class environment, health, and safety infrastructure, and we continually make improvements and enhancements to ensure that it is state-of-the-art. We make these ongoing investments in the normal course of business, which includes careful review and implementation of recommendations that are presented to us through credible research."⁶⁵

In addition, analysts raised concerns regarding the disclosure of used chemicals in products. Democratic Party Lawmaker Lee Mi-kyung (Lee) clarified this by saying that disclosure regarding used chemicals in the US was mandatory.⁶⁶ While the American branch of Samsung in USA followed this, its South Korean branch did not. Lee stressed that the company was expected to be more transparent in its operations.⁶⁷ While a news daily reported in 2011 that, Samsung was willing to bear the treatment costs of the cancer patients employed at its semiconductor and LCD plants, it also said that the eligibility conditions to avail this

compensation package were so severe that many employees could not receive the treatment.⁶⁸ Reacting to this statement, Staines clarified that Samsung “has strengthened its support programs for employees who have developed serious illnesses” and that “the company is committed to providing support for hospital expenses and living expenses.”⁶⁹ Likewise, members belonging to the Samsung Accountability Campaign alleged that the company operated “with impunity” and called it “one of the most corrupt operations on the planet.”⁷⁰

While many global electronics companies were successful in eliminating toxic chemicals from the products manufactured by them, their manufacturing and supply chains still relied on energy sources which contributed to climate change.⁷¹ At the same time many of these companies lagged behind in effectively managing their e-waste. With the rapid growth of such companies, analysts were of the opinion that only corporate environmental leadership could prevent a rise in e-waste and ensure that the industry shifted its focus on using clean energy to manufacture

necessary products.⁷² They also observed that since electronics companies gained political power in several countries, their support for clean energy had the potential to impact government policy.⁷³ Analysts were apprehensive that even if Samsung initiated measures to reduce its environmental footprint, they were uncertain about the viability of these initiatives in the long run. They raised questions regarding Samsung's ability to strike the right note for corporate survival. Nevertheless, Greenpeace International IT analyst Casey Harrell expressed some amount of optimism in Samsung's efforts by saying, “Given the massive energy crisis around the world including caused by depleting & polluting fossil fuel, the next big environmental challenge for consumer electronics companies is to reduce their carbon pollution.”⁷⁴ He further added, “Companies should work with their suppliers to implement more efficient manufacturing processes and to power the supply chain with renewable energy, not fossil fuels, just as they have successfully done to reduce the toxic materials in electronics.”⁷⁵

ENDNOTES

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⁴ *ibid.*

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²¹ “SAMSUNG'S PERFORMANCE IN DETAIL,” <http://www.greenpeace.org/international/en/Guide-to-Greener-Electronics/18th-Edition/SAMSUNG/>, November 2012

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²⁵ “Environment,” *op.cit.*

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³⁰ *ibid.*

³¹ *ibid.*

³² *ibid.*

³³ “Global Harmony with people, society & environment,” *op.cit.*

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³⁵ *ibid.*

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⁴⁰ *ibid.*

⁴¹ *ibid.*

⁴² *ibid.*

⁴³ *ibid.*

⁴⁴ *ibid.*

⁴⁵ “Global Harmony with people, society & environment,” *op.cit.*