



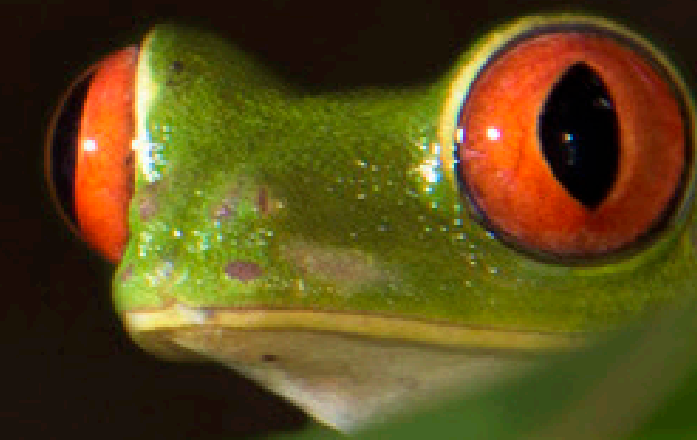
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The Path to Environmental, Social,  
and Governance Excellence:

# Spotlight on Environmental Sustainability

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FEBRUARY 2022



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## Introduction

Corporations have an obligation to do virtually everything in their power to protect the environment. It's central to your corporate social responsibility programs. It's good for your employees. It's good for your communities. It's good for business. It's good for the planet. It's the right thing to do. It's the only thing to do.

The good news is that more corporations are recognizing this obligation and are taking steps in the right direction. Ninety percent of the companies in the S&P 500 Index published corporate social responsibility reports in 2019, according to the Harvard Business School, up from only 20% in 2011.<sup>1</sup> In response to the COVID-19 pandemic, it is expected that companies will place an even greater emphasis on environmental, social, and governance (ESG) initiatives, with a particular focus on environmental sustainability.

The bad news is that time is working against us. Science shows that we must limit global temperature rise to 1.5 degrees Celsius, compared to pre-industrial levels. To limit warming to that level we must move toward a net zero economy by 2050—which means emitting no more carbon dioxide than we remove from the atmosphere.

We are already lagging behind. According to the United Nations, even if all countries in the Paris Climate Accord meet their goals, their efforts would put the world on a path to achieve a 1% reduction in global emissions by 2030, compared to 2010 levels.<sup>2</sup> By contrast, scientists have said emissions must fall by nearly 50% this decade to create a realistic shot at avoiding devastating temperature rise, per The Washington Post.<sup>3</sup> A recent UN scientific report paints a dire picture of the future if we don't act quickly and aggressively toward achieving neutral carbon emissions.<sup>4</sup>

Companies must recognize that this is a crisis and that they have a critical role to play in mitigating and reversing it. Climate change is our generation's problem to solve. If not us, who? If not now, when?

<sup>1</sup> Source: Harvard Business School Online, *What is a CSR Report and Why Is It Important?*, April 2021.

<sup>2</sup> Source: NDC Synthesis Report, *United Nations Climate Change*, February 2021.

<sup>3</sup> Source: The Washington Post, *United Nations: Countries' pledges to cut emissions are far too meager to halt climate change*, February 2021.

<sup>4</sup> Source: The New York Times, *A Hotter Future is Certain, Climate Panel Warns. But How Hot is Up to Us*, August 2021.

Business leaders committed to environmental, social, and governance progress as the bulwark of their corporate social responsibility efforts may be wondering: “What more can our company do to help protect the planet and maximize our commitment to environmental sustainability?”

This eBook is designed to help answer that question.

We look at practical steps companies can take, from the top down, the bottom up, and organically throughout the organization, to fulfill their corporate social responsibility mission and do their share to protect the planet. We explore best practices, including building a socially aware corporate culture, setting sustainability goals, and holding the organization accountable for achieving those goals.

As an example of the significant impact companies can achieve through an unflagging commitment to environmental sustainability, we look at Cisco as a model. Cisco is setting a standard in corporate social responsibility and environmental sustainability that is an exemplar that can serve as a case study and inspiration for other companies around the world.

Among other achievements, Cisco has reduced Scope 1 and Scope 2 greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions by 60% as of its 2021 fiscal year (FY07 baseline), while using energy generated from renewable sources for 85% of its global electricity demand. Beyond emissions reductions in its own operations, Cisco is working across its value chain to create a circular economy and reduce GHG emissions, driving sustainability through focused, measurable initiatives in supply chain and lifecycle management.

Environmental sustainability is not an option. It’s a mandate. As noted by Cisco Chairman and CEO Chuck Robbins: “We are at a critical moment in the history of our nation and the world. There is so much we can do to seize the moment and create a more inclusive and sustainable world together. I remain hopeful for our future and am optimistic that together we can continue to drive change and leave a lasting impact for generations to come.”<sup>5</sup>

**The time to act is now. Here’s why and here’s how.**

**“ Cisco has reduced Scope 1 and Scope 2 GHG emissions by 60% as of its 2021 fiscal year (FY07 baseline), while using energy generated from renewable sources for 85% of its global electricity demand.”**

## CHAPTER ONE

**The ESG Mandate (Emphasis on the “E”)**

It's a new era in corporate social responsibility and, in particular, the role that companies must play in reducing their carbon footprints and supporting broad initiatives to protect the environment. Long gone are the days when corporations and business leaders could afford to be complacent when it comes to environmental, social, and governance issues.

Customers and employees, particularly younger ones, are increasingly aware of a company's posture, attitudes, and actions, and are increasingly inclined to punish companies that aren't adequately addressing ESG issues. In fact, the state of climate change and the prevailing moods and desires of customers and employees dictate that companies should be proactive, aggressive, innovative, and vocal about their commitment to social responsibility and environmental sustainability. Otherwise, they risk not doing enough, in both perception and reality.

The winds of change have been blowing in the direction of corporate social responsibility for many years, but 2020 was definitely a turning point, triggered, of course, by the global COVID-19 pandemic and the reaction to the murder of George Floyd.

In 2022, we are witnessing the impact of climate change on a nearly daily basis all over the world. Many of our worst fears were confirmed by a sobering report issued in August 2021 by the United Nations Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change. Among other findings, the report says that the world has a very limited window to mitigate the most devastating impacts of climate change.<sup>6</sup>

The more research you explore into the importance of ESG—and especially the “E”—the more you walk away with the inescapable conclusion that focusing on environmental sustainability is not just the right thing for the planet; it’s also the right thing for your business. **Here’s just a small sample:**



In a global survey of more than 2,000 C-suite executives released in early 2020, Deloitte noted the following: “It’s telling that nearly all business leaders we surveyed fear that the effects of climate change could negatively affect their organizations, and half cite tackling climate change as their generation’s top priority.”<sup>7</sup>



The climate concerns are leading to actions: “Business leaders accept a responsibility to act,” according to Deloitte, and many are rolling out programs addressing resource scarcity and environmental sustainability. More than 90% of respondents say their companies have sustainability initiatives in place or on the drawing board.”<sup>8</sup>



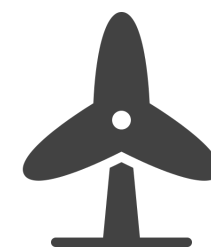
In other research conducted before the pandemic, 70% of consumers said they agree that large companies have a special responsibility for making the world a better place. Certainly that number has grown, given the events of the past couple of years.



In research conducted during the pandemic, 93% of employees said now, more than ever, companies must lead with purpose; 88% said it is no longer acceptable for companies to just make money; companies must positively impact society as well. Nearly 70% of employees said they won’t work for a company that doesn’t have a strong purpose.<sup>10</sup>



More than three quarters of consumers said they are motivated to purchase from companies committed to making the world better, and nearly 70% said they would be motivated to recommend the company to others.<sup>11</sup>



Younger people care deeply about commitment to climate and sustainability; in a separate Deloitte survey, more than one in four millennials and Gen Zers said they believe businesses should try to help mitigate the effects of human-caused climate change and protect and improve the environment.<sup>12</sup>



In pre-pandemic research conducted by the Enterprise Strategy Group, 40% of workers said that the fact that current or potential employers supported charitable or social causes was very important to them.<sup>13</sup> In addition, 40% of people under age 45 said they would prefer not to use a product or service from a technology vendor if they didn’t agree with the vendor’s social and political positions and/or track record.<sup>14</sup>

**The mandate is clear.** But how can companies maximize their commitment and contribution?

<sup>7</sup> Source: Deloitte, *Industry 4.0: At the intersection of readiness and responsibility*, January 2020.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

<sup>9</sup> Source: AFLAC, *2019 AFLAC CSR Survey*, July 2019.

<sup>10</sup> Source: Porter Novelli, *Employee Perspectives on Responsible Leadership During Crisis*, August 2020.

<sup>11</sup> Source: AFLAC, *2019 AFLAC CSR Survey*, July 2019.

<sup>12</sup> Source: Forbes, *Reducing Environmental Impact is Now a Business Imperative*, January 2020.

<sup>13</sup> Source: ESG Research Report, *2019 Digital Work Survey*, December 2019.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid.



## CHAPTER TWO

# The Path to ESG Excellence

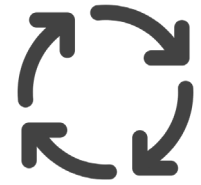
Each industry is different and every company is different. A company in agriculture will have a different set of challenges than one in energy. A company with a global footprint will have to deal with regulations that vary from country to country versus a company that serves a specific country or region.

While there are obvious points of differentiation on the path to ESG excellence, there are also points of commonality and best practices that are applicable and adaptable across most industries and companies.

First and foremost, it is essential to have a comprehensive strategy that equips a company and its people to look holistically at all environmental, social, and governance issues so the organization can provide more effective and sustainable solutions. Key common elements among best practices on the path to ESG excellence are:

**COMMITTED LEADERSHIP:**

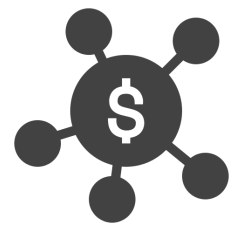
While individuals throughout an organization can have a significant impact, companies that are most successful in achieving ESG excellence have leaders that set the tone, articulate a vision, and put executives and teams in place with a defined role to ensure that the company's commitment translates into action that can be measured and monitored.

**BUILDING AN ESG-INSPIRED CORPORATE CULTURE:**

Top-down, bottom up, and organically throughout the organization, everyone in the company, supply chain, and across the ecosystem has to be aware of the company's commitment to ESG. A corporate culture that is ESG-aware and ESG-inspired must be embedded everywhere in the organization.

**EDUCATION AND TRAINING:**

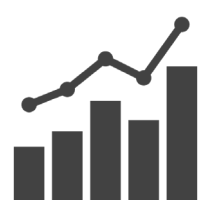
Part of building an ESG-inspired culture is making a commitment to educating and training employees on the importance of ESG and the steps they can take to help the company make improvements. Among other things, this means conducting workshops, building steering committees, and giving employees the time to focus on education and training.

**INVESTMENT:**

Investing in ESG (with an emphasis on the "E") can and should take a wide variety of forms across the organization. It's important to adopt circular economic principles across the business, from how you design the product to how you bring it to market to how you manage its lifecycle.

**SETTING GOALS AND MAKING THEM PUBLIC:**

Each company should establish specific goals for critical initiatives, such as reducing GHG emissions, making products more energy efficient, reducing waste, promoting circular economy principles across the value chain, training and educating employees, etc. Making the goals public in an internal- and external-facing corporate social responsibility report makes the company and its leadership accountable and is an important factor in establishing an ESG-inspired corporate culture.

**MONITORING, MEASURING, AND REPORTING ON YOUR PROGRESS:**

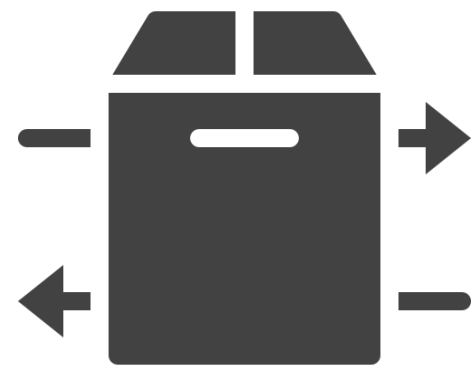
A critical component of the corporate social responsibility report should be your "report card" on how you are doing in meeting your goals, with explanations of what specific actions the organization is taking across the ESG landscape. Consumers and employees are very aware of whether companies are committed to following through on the promises they make. Communicating your progress is vital and, just as important, by setting goals and measuring your progress, you are also articulating your vision for, and commitment to, ESG excellence.



In the high tech and telecommunications arena, Cisco has taken a strong leadership role in exhibiting and advocating for ESG excellence, both internally and across its supply chain and partner ecosystem. Cisco was ranked No. 1 in the Gartner Supply Chain Top 25 in 2020 and 2021; No. 1 in IT Industry IPE Supply Chain Climate Action Index 2021; and No. 1 in IT Industry IPE Green Supply Chain Corporate Information Transparency Index (CITI).

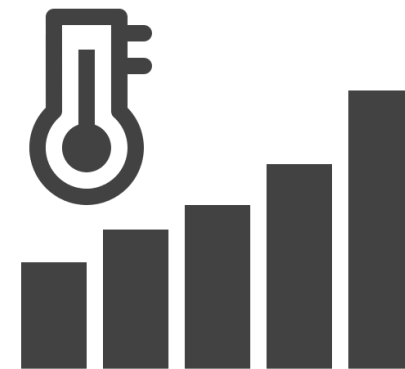
One of the key factors in Cisco's ability to achieve excellence in ESG is in taking an organization-wide approach and focusing on specific areas where its work directly impacts customers, employees, and the company's brand. Cisco also recognizes that a company's commitment to ESG excellence not only bolsters long-term value for the business; it is also part of the company's obligation to shareholders, customers, employees, communities, and the planet.

## SUPPLY CHAIN AWARDS & RECOGNITION



### **RANKED NO. 1**

in the Gartner Supply Chain  
Top 25 report in 2020 and 2021



### **RANKED NO. 1**

in IT Industry IPE Supply Chain  
Climate Action Index 2021



### **RANKED NO. 1**

in IT Industry IPE Green Supply  
Chain Corporate Information  
Transparency Index (CITI)

As noted, each company in its own industry should set its own priorities when it comes to achieving best practices in ESG. Cisco identifies, executes and reports on corporate social responsibility and sustainability programs to investors and stakeholders in each area of ESG:

- **Environmental:** Climate change and GHGs; circular design and lifecycle management; environmental protection; operational waste and water management.
- **Social:** Employee health and safety and labor rights; employee wellbeing; inclusion and diversity; talent; community impact; human rights and working conditions in the supply chain; critical human needs and disaster relief; digital inclusion; economic empowerment.
- **Governance:** Business ethics; corporate governance; data security and privacy; innovation and responsible technology.

In the next chapter, we take a deeper dive into the specifics of how Cisco has been able to maximize its commitment to environmental sustainability, including the results it has already achieved and the goals it has set for the future.

## DEFINING SUSTAINABILITY THROUGH ESG



### ENVIRONMENTAL

Climate change and GHGs; circular design and lifecycle management; environmental protection; operational waste and water management.



### SOCIAL

Employee health and safety and labor rights; employee wellbeing; inclusion and diversity; talent; community impact; human rights and working conditions in the supply chain; critical human needs and disaster relief; digital inclusion; economic empowerment.



### GOVERNANCE

Business ethics; corporate governance; data security and privacy; innovation and responsible technology.

## CHAPTER THREE

## The Cisco Environmental Sustainability Story

Environmental sustainability and corporate social responsibility are grounded in Cisco's Conscious Culture and are core to the company's purpose and how it does business. This has always been the case since Cisco's founding, but it has become more codified in recent years.

For example, Cisco set its first GHG emissions goal in 2006. Since then, the company has set other goals to engage employees, reduce environmental impacts on its supply chain, and benefit communities. In 2021, Cisco completed its third, absolute five-year goal to reduce GHG emissions from its operations. This target, covering Scope 1 and Scope 2 emissions, was met one year ahead of schedule and was approved by the Science Based Targets initiative (SBTi) and is consistent with reductions required to keep warming to well below 2°C.

Cisco has received an A or A- score on climate change from CDP every year since 2015. The list includes companies from around the world that have been identified as leaders in their reporting and actions to reduce GHG emissions. The company has also been recognized as a leader across other ESG ratings and indices, including MSCI, IPE, and the Dow Jones Sustainability Indices.

Cisco recently announced new commitments to achieve net zero GHG emissions across all scopes by 2040, with a near-term goal to reach net zero for Scope 1 and Scope 2 emissions by 2025. These commitments will be partnered with newly adopted and existing company-wide strategies to reduce emissions across Cisco's entire value chain.

Cisco's purpose is "to power an inclusive future for all." This mantra guides the company and holds its leaders, employees, and supply chains accountable for the larger impact they have on the world. In business practice and in corporate culture and philosophy, Cisco believes that an inclusive future will only be possible if caring for the planet is a top priority for countries, companies, organizations, and individuals.

Cisco has prioritized three specific action areas where the company can positively impact some of the world's most pressing issues around environmental sustainability. **These are:**



These are all areas that require strong action, whereby Cisco has determined it can have meaningful, measurable, and long-term positive impact. To monitor that impact, the company sets clear public goals against which it measures and reports its progress so it can be held accountable—to employees, customers, partners, shareholders, communities, and, ultimately, to the planet.

Each year, Cisco reports on its enterprise goals in its Purpose Report (previously called the Corporate Social Responsibility Impact Report) and discusses its progress toward those goals, while also explaining how it is going about achieving them. An outside body independently assures that the stated environmental sustainability reporting is accurate.

**“ In 2020, Cisco as a company formalized its new purpose: To power an inclusive future for all.”**

In the remainder of this chapter, we explore the three pillars of Cisco’s environmental sustainability initiatives and how the company has performed against them, based on its 2021 Purpose Report, titled “[Our Purpose, Our Progress.](#)”

One of the main purposes in presenting this information is to show that creative and innovative ideas—within the context of a commitment to a Conscious Culture—can have a meaningful effect on our planet and its future. Cisco and similarly committed companies across all industries are recognizing the impact they can have on climate change. From Cisco’s perspective, an important goal is to be intentional about how it uses its power and influence.

## Addressing the Climate Crisis

The need to reduce GHG emissions and energy use has taken on a heightened sense of urgency with the recent release of the report by the United Nations Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change.<sup>15</sup>

Cisco's plan to address the climate crisis and reach net zero by 2040 covers the company’s full carbon footprint, including the use of its products, operations, and supply chain. To achieve and maintain the company's Scope 1 and 2 GHG reductions, Cisco has invested \$45 million between fiscal 2018 and fiscal 2022 to implement hundreds of efficiency projects, such as improving airflow in its labs, installing LED lighting, and optimizing its mechanical equipment.

Investments in renewable energy over the past 15 years have also helped the company drive down Scope 1 and 2 emissions. Cisco's strategy includes a combination of renewable energy purchases, on-site solar installations, green power contracts with local utilities, and power purchase agreements (PPAs) that add new renewable energy to the local electricity grid.

### CISCO NET ZERO GOAL:



**Reach net zero  
GHG emissions  
by 2040**

Another area of focus for Cisco is product energy efficiency. The company uses Product Carbon Footprints (PCF) to estimate the GHG emissions of its products through their entire lifecycle. To improve the efficiency of individual products, the company leverages a number of strategies, including developing innovative ways to cool its products, reducing power loss in high-speed interconnect designs, and offering higher-efficiency power supplies.

For example, Cisco designs its own energy-efficient chip set to go inside its own products. Products like Cisco 8201 are helping Cisco reduce the energy intensity of its equipment by utilizing Silicon One, a programmable application-specific integrated circuit (ASIC) for high-performance networking. The Cisco 8201 router is far smaller than its predecessor, the NCS 6008, shrinking from a chassis more than seven feet tall to a single rack unit the size of a pizza box. The Cisco 8201 consumes 96% less energy per year than the NCS 6008, while supplying 35% more bandwidth, as well as being five times more power-efficient than its closest competitor. More efficient energy consumption and material use both reduce GHG emissions.

Other key initiatives and investments in addressing the climate crisis include:



Supporting innovative solutions that can reverse or slow the effects of climate change. For example, in April 2021, the Cisco Foundation announced a \$100 million, 10-year commitment to support climate solutions through non-profit grants and impact investing.



Through the annual Cisco Global Problem Solver Challenge, the company awards cash prizes to tech start-ups that address social and environmental challenges. In June 2021, Cisco awarded the first-ever \$50,000 Greenhouse Gas Solutions Prize to a company called Remora, which is piloting a way to capture carbon dioxide emissions from semi trucks and repurpose or sequester them. In 2022, the Cisco Global Problem Solver Challenge will award five prizes totalling \$300,000 USD for climate impact and regeneration solutions.

**“ The Cisco 8201 consumes 96% less energy per year than its predecessor, the NCS 6008, while supplying 35% more bandwidth, as well as being five times more power-efficient than its closest competitor.”**

## Driving a Circular Economy

Circular economy principles are essential to environmental sustainability, reducing the impact of climate change, waste, and pollution. Cisco is committed to integrating circular economy principles across its company and supply chain ecosystem, adapting business models to reduce resources consumed and waste generated.

Cisco's approach to a circular economy model involves designing out waste and pollution from the beginning, extending the life span of products and materials in use, and regenerating natural systems. Initiatives are divided into five major areas:

- 1. Circular design:** Design products and packaging with circularity in mind, such as design for reuse, repair, recycling, and resource efficiency.
- 2. Circular operations:** Reduce consumption and use renewable resources across the value chain.
- 3. Circular consumption:** Manage equipment for multiple lifecycles and deploy new business models to facilitate this approach.
- 4. Circular solutions:** Shape and pioneer technology solutions and services to enable circular economy value creation for customers.
- 5. Ecosystem leadership:** Advance a circular economy through industry innovation, collaboration, and public policy.

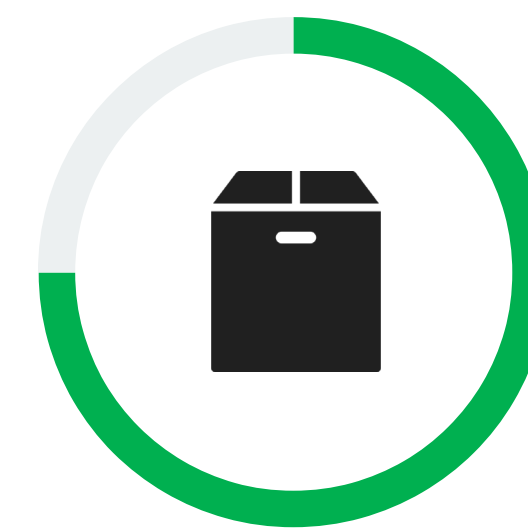
Circular economy principles are manifested in a wide range of ways across Cisco and its supply chain. For example, the company established its own set of Circular Design Principles in fiscal 2020 with a stated goal of having 100% of new Cisco products and packaging design incorporate these principles by fiscal 2025. Other 2025 goals include:



**20%**  
decrease in the use  
of virgin plastics  
(FY18 base year).



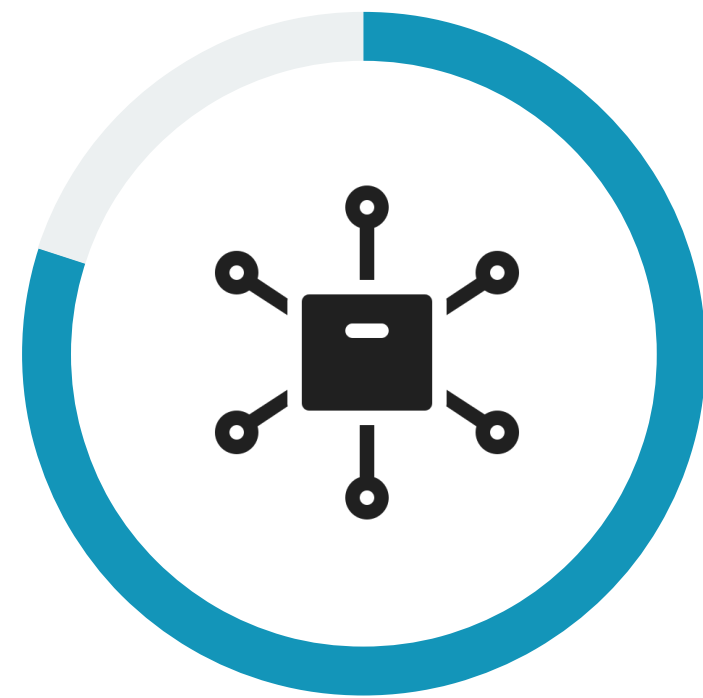
**50%**  
improvement in product  
packaging cube efficiency  
(FY19 base year).



**75%**  
reduction in foam use in  
product packaging as measured  
by weight (FY19 base year).

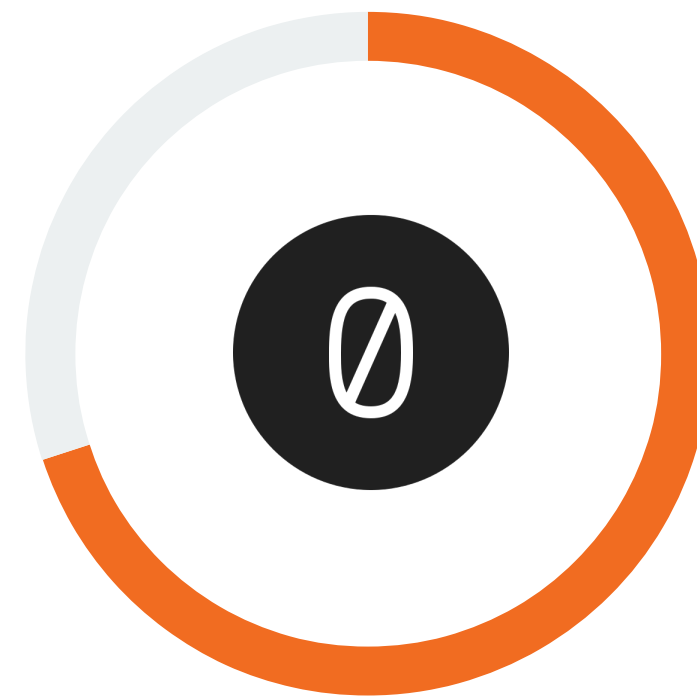
In fiscal 2021, Cisco reported 26 percent improvement toward its 2025 packaging efficiency goal. The company also implemented several projects that target key focus areas for sustainable packaging. Overall, Cisco eliminated 336,000 pounds of corrugate from its total packaging shipped, equivalent to nearly half a million pizza boxes, in fiscal 2021.

The circular economy efforts extend to Cisco partners throughout its supply chain. The company has set important and ambitious goals across its ecosystem, including:



**80%**

of Cisco component, manufacturing, and logistics suppliers by spend will have a public, absolute GHG emission reduction target by fiscal 2025.



**70%**

of Cisco component and manufacturing suppliers by spend will achieve a zero-waste diversion rate at one or more sites by fiscal 2025.



Supply chain-related Scope 3 GHG emissions will be reduced by

**30%**

absolute by fiscal 2030, using fiscal 2019 as a base year.



## Building Resiliency

Environmental issues such as climate change, pollution, and waste disproportionately affect disadvantaged socioeconomic groups who are less resilient to the impact from these issues. At the core of Cisco's Conscious Culture is a commitment to reduce the impact on local ecosystems and to support those who experience the most severe effects of a changing climate and other environmental disruptions.

For example, Cisco supports local initiatives to reduce pollution and preserve water and other natural resources in communities where the company and its suppliers operate. The company also strives to reduce GHG emissions and lessen its impact on resources by investing consistently and heavily in renewable sources of energy and designing its products to be energy efficient.

### Some examples:

Cisco strives to reduce water consumption to protect this limited resource because access to clean, fresh water is a critical human need. While Cisco does not use significant amounts of water in its operations, it has launched a number of water-saving initiatives. For example:



#### HABITAT RESTORATION

In one pilot project, Cisco achieved water neutrality at its Research Triangle Park (RTP), N.C. campus by implementing water reduction projects and supporting off-site local water restoration projects that collectively restore a volume of water equal to the campus's annual consumption. One of these projects removed a decommissioned dam to reconnect 140 miles of streams and create free-flowing aquatic habitat for several species.



#### WATER MANAGEMENT

In Bangalore, India, Cisco implemented a comprehensive water management system at its campus, including a rainwater harvesting system, an evaporative cooling system, and two sewage treatment plants. Cisco also seeks to improve the vitality of water systems in the areas where its supply chain operates. For example, a survey of suppliers helped identify those consuming high amounts of fresh water in water-stressed areas. Cisco worked with one supplier to complete two large water savings projects, which allowed the supplier to save approximately 51,000 liters of fresh water per day—enough to meet the needs of a family of four for approximately six weeks.

“ To date, **Caldas da Rainha has reduced water management costs by 33% and waste collection costs by 67%.**”

### SUSTAINABLE COMMUNITIES



Cisco products, services, and social investment programs are being used in a number of ways to make communities more sustainable. For example, in Portugal, the city of Caldas da Rainha has deployed a full breadth of products from the Cisco Internet of Things (IoT) portfolio, including solutions for improving water management and monitoring parking, bus systems, and waste collection. The city has IoT sensors to monitor water quality and consumption. Within the first few weeks of testing, the system detected a leak of 200,000 litres and then helped in controlling and correcting the problem. To date, Caldas da Rainha has reduced water management costs by 33% and waste collection costs by 67%.<sup>16</sup>

### REUSE



Cisco engineers are cognizant of the fact that customers have similar sustainability goals and embrace this as an opportunity to make a vital contribution. Cisco products and solutions provide the infrastructure that customers, communities, and governments can use to improve their own resiliency to climate-related disruptions and preserve natural resources. In addition to making products more energy efficient, Cisco also designs them to better facilitate repair and remanufacturing—with the goal to reuse products and materials rather than dispose of them.



## CHAPTER FOUR

### Looking Ahead

This is a critical time for every company to make a solemn commitment to environmental, social, and governance initiatives with a particular emphasis on environmental sustainability. No company can do it alone, but with aggressive actions, decisive leadership, and commitments to an ESG-conscious culture, every company can do its part to protect the planet.

Cisco has proven in action and achievements that each company can make a difference. Whether it is reducing carbon emissions, transitioning to a circular economy, reducing waste, improving resiliency, or dozens of other initiatives, the possibilities are endless—and the mandate is clear.

We are in a new era of corporate social responsibility and ESG, with an urgent need to focus on environmental sustainability. Each company must do its part. How well we do will help determine the world we leave to future generations. It is our responsibility, our obligation. The time to act is now.



Cisco is the worldwide leader in technology that powers the Internet. Cisco inspires new possibilities by reimagining customer applications, securing data, transforming customer infrastructure, and empowering teams for a global and inclusive future. Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) at Cisco supports the company's mission to power an inclusive future for all, which benefits our employees, communities, and the planet.

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