

## **Interview from December 2007 *Carbon Copy***

### **Interview with Corporate Climate Champion: Rick Robinson**

**EPA:** Mack Trucks and Volvo Trucks North America (VTNA) joined Climate Leaders in 2003. What kinds of changes have you seen take place in your company to help meet your Climate Leaders goal?

**RR:** Mack and VTNA's involvement in the Climate Leaders program has been a huge success and has helped both companies further solidify their stance on climate change as well as their desire to be "best in class" relating to overall environmental performance. Further, it is our hope that through this partnership, and by choosing an aggressive goal to reduce GHG emissions by 20 percent per unit by 2010, Mack and VTNA will send a strong message to employees, customers, and the general public that we're working to be part of the solution—not the problem. Another significant improvement that has brought about positive changes throughout the organization is the implementation of the ISO 14001 environmental management systems (EMS) in all of our operations. We chose to use our EMS as a tool to help us reach our Climate Leaders reduction goal, as it requires our facilities to establish targets to continuously improve their environmental performance. Now that we're an EPA Climate Leaders Partner and have pledged to reduce GHG emissions by 20 percent, all of the ISO 14001 certified facilities are contributing to the overall reduction goal by establishing specific energy reduction objectives for their particular facilities. So far, it's been effective, as from 2003 to 2006, Mack and VTNA have surpassed their goals, reducing GHGs by 54 percent and 45 percent per unit, respectively.

**EPA:** Can you tell us about Volvo's "Environmental Care" policy and how it has shaped the company?

**RR:** Our Swedish-based parent company, AB Volvo, established "Care for the Environment" in the early 1990s as one of its three core values, sending a strong message to the group's internal and external stakeholders that the company places a large emphasis on environmental stewardship. To illustrate this, I've witnessed a significant transformation since Volvo acquired Mack Trucks in 2001, attributed in large part to the core environmental value. For instance, when I first started working at Mack nine years ago as an environmental engineer, the EH&S department's main focus was ensuring compliance with regulations, and time-permitting, we might work on a recycling project. Today, our department and others put a great deal of focus on energy reduction. Using the corporate office as an example, I recently noticed that on their own initiative the facilities department installed motion sensors in the vending machines, which automatically turn off the display lights when no one is around. We also just partnered with an energy contractor to make facility-wide energy improvements that will result in a guaranteed 30-percent reduction in energy use, and are considering purchasing renewable energy certificates (RECs) to completely offset carbon emissions from electricity use in the corporate offices. These are just a few examples of a significantly

changed culture that I'm not sure would have occurred without Volvo's environmental core value.

**EPA:** What is one of the most valuable lessons you have learned on the job?

**RR:** One lesson I've learned is that to be effective, you must have upper management's buy-in and support. Without it, the project is doomed to fail. So when we decided to pursue joining Climate Leaders, we started with top management, knowing that once they agreed everybody else would follow suit—which was exactly what occurred.

**EPA:** The New River Valley, Virginia, facility has reduced its electricity and natural gas consumption by 20 percent each, and has won awards from the state for its environmental stewardship. Can you describe a few of the practices in place at that facility that have made it so successful?

**RR:** New River Valley (NRV) is often viewed as the most progressive and proactive facility in the Volvo Group when it comes to reducing energy usage. As a result of its significant energy reductions, which have saved millions of dollars, the NRV plant has become a benchmark for the company, and our other facilities have followed its lead. Since 2002, NRV has aggressively pursued a range of energy reduction strategies, including conserving energy, substituting less-polluting fuels, and adopting new energy technologies—especially renewable energy systems. In my opinion, NRV's successes can largely be attributed to several factors. NRV was the first Volvo operation in the United States to obtain the ISO 14001 certification, so its management system is relatively mature. As a result, its employees (including upper management) have a high level of environmental awareness and are accustomed to continually improving environmental performance. The plant's environmental manager has succeeded in convincing management that the facility could reduce both energy and operating costs while reducing GHGs. The savings were realized, the environmental benefits were confirmed, and management was sold!

**EPA:** What challenges and opportunities do you face as you continue to seek GHG and energy use reductions?

**RR:** Eventually we will have identified all of the relatively easy, "low-hanging fruit" reductions we can make and will reach the point of diminishing returns where the opportunities to reduce energy will be more difficult to identify. As this occurs, the biggest challenge will be gaining support for projects that have a less favorable return on investment for the near term. However, there are many outside forces that can quickly make these types of projects more cost effective, such as increased energy prices, climate change inspired legislation, tax incentives, etc.

**EPA:** Do you have any advice that you would like to share with environmental and energy managers?

**RR:** Establish a relationship with your corporate communications/affairs departments! Unfortunately, it is typical for achievements to be well understood within the confines of the environmental department, but unknown elsewhere in the organization. In recent years, however, public interest in and concern for the environment has grown tremendously. The company's environmentally-sensitive policies and practices have become a source of pride for most employees, and that pride is demonstrated in how they feel about their jobs and how they communicate that pride outside of the workplace. So if your organization is making positive changes, don't miss the opportunity to brag about them!