

Sustainability – A Core Business

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30/06/2023 The Boehringer Ingelheim research pharmaceutical company shows how a global corporation can be strongly committed to anchoring sustainability in a vibrant corporate culture—in all of its departments and for all of its 53,000 employees.

Large flags wave in stately fashion above the main entrance to Boehringer Ingelheim in the western German county of Mainz-Bingen, near the Rhine River and the vineyards of Rhineland-Palatinate and Hesse. They bear the logo of the world-famous company. The word “sustainability” would be a fitting addition—because Boehringer Ingelheim has devoted itself to this topic more than almost any other company in Germany. Impressive examples illustrate its commitment, like a new biomass heating plant that will start up in Ingelheim in late 2023 and sustainably supply up to 80 percent of the town’s energy needs with lower carbon emissions. It will be powered by wood waste unsuitable for any other purpose. In the words of Lars Murawski, Vice President for Environment Health, Safety, and Sustainability, the project is a “quantum leap.”

Environmental protection tastes good, too

The cafeterias at the pharmaceutical company founded by Albert Boehringer back in 1885 stopped using disposable plastic utensils long ago. The meat they serve comes from animals reared under species-appropriate conditions. Boehringer Ingelheim's food services alone have cut their original emission levels by 20 percent. For this they received not only "Germany's best cafeteria" honors from the "Food & Health" initiative but also their first "Green Canteen" certification. And finally, the company stands out with its sustainable practices for conferences and meetings. Its "Green Meetings" approach begins with encouraging participants to travel to events on public transportation. It selects locations that prioritize energy efficiency and careful use of materials. For trade fairs and exhibitions it also thinks and acts in green ways, including constructing its stands with sustainable materials, avoiding single-use packaging, and refraining from offering promotional gifts.

Boehringer Ingelheim is the first pharmaceutical corporation to be recognized as a "climate protection company" by Germany's Federal Ministry for the Environment. It has clearly earned this status, having worked for years to integrate sustainability into all of its operational levels. Examples include continuous further development of energy-efficient building technology with sustainable and intelligently controlled heat and air-conditioning, the production and supply of green power, careful use of water, plans for a step-by-step conversion of its fleet to electric vehicles, and intelligent green logistics. The latter is linked with ever more ambitious targets to reduce the number of kilometers traversed by the company's suppliers.

The list of additional activities devoted to continuously improving sustainability is long, and investments are on the order of a hundred million euros. One major pillar is the global "More Green" program, which is Boehringer Ingelheim's network for ecological sustainability. "More Green" encompasses a range of activities designed to protect the planet, its resources, and forms of life. Special priorities are placed on achieving carbon neutrality for company processes by the year 2030, reducing supply chain emissions, improving circular economy systems, and reducing water use footprints. These measures apply to all of the company's sites.

What's important to note is that the "Sustainable Development—For Generations" program is by no means a belated response to urgent calls for greater environmental protection and responsibility. Quite the contrary: ever since it was founded in 1885, Boehringer Ingelheim can show that its actions have consistently been guided by principles of sustainability and resource preservation.

53,000 people with one shared goal

"We're helping to make the world a better place for current and future generations, and to create ideal conditions for a healthy planet," says Murawski. That itself sounds like an ideal. But it's more than that. The resolve is clearly present in the everyday routines of the corporation and its approximately 53,000 employees. "As a pharmaceutical research company we're especially interested in environmental

protection and sustainable action because there's a direct connection between our core business and climate protection," he notes. "You can only improve the health of people and animals if you have a healthy environment—and a healthy planet in turn means healthier people and animals."

Beating the curve

In addition to the company's own sources of motivation, the need to ensure compliance with ever stricter regulatory requirements also drives the work of Boehringer Ingelheim's more than 350 EHS (environment, health, safety) staff members. As governments and international institutions sharpen their focus on sustainability, ever more laws and regulations are introduced, along with reporting requirements. Taxes and fees in the sector are expected to rise further over the coming years. There could also be stronger restrictions on product applications. "We're always trying to stay out in front of the curve," says Murawski in describing the company's efforts to act as early as possible as well as independently of government directives.

Dr. Tim Dereymaeker, Associate Partner ESG & Sustainability at Porsche Consulting, applauds this approach. "Boehringer Ingelheim is setting a strong example. Every company should be minimizing the risks associated with stricter EHS requirements in order to generate sustainable value for themselves, society, and the environment—and to reduce future costs. Sustainability has become a key challenge in every industry, in terms of both strategy and operations. If companies don't act sustainably sooner or later, I'm afraid they won't be able to survive."

This is clear to Boehringer Ingelheim. "Sustainability is part of our corporate culture," says Murawski. "We want to minimize our impact as much as possible. That means not only in development and production, but also in the everyday operations at all of our sites." He and his team, which includes Annette Eckes, Senior Manager Circular Economy at corporate headquarters, and Ingo Weiss, Head of Global Environment & Sustainability Management, are eager to support the mission and "bring our ideas to life." One factor in success lies in not just promoting sustainability from the top down but also supporting it from the bottom up. "Our employees at all the sites can and should contribute their ideas and energy to new developments. For that we need consistency and transparency, which is our responsibility in Ingelheim as the headquarters of our global EHS network." And that works. As Murawski sums it up, "It's amazing how much power comes from our employees."

Porsche Consulting supports sustainability

Since early 2021, an interdisciplinary team from Porsche Consulting has been supporting Boehringer Ingelheim on its journey toward sustainability. In the first stage of their collaboration, the partners conducted analyses and took stock in order to make the status quo transparent throughout the corporation. How high are the company's carbon emissions? How much water is consumed? Where is most of the waste produced? After those six or eight weeks of project work, proposals were developed for a catalogue of measures that was presented to decision-makers. As sustainability expert

Dereymaeker explains, “For us, projects of this type always include calculating the business cases.

Boehringer Ingelheim had multiple reasons for its decision to work on sustainability with Porsche Consulting. According to Murawski, long-term successful client relations in other areas such as quality management were one factor. Another was Porsche Consulting’s “experience with EHS transformations in other companies and industries.” As he explains, “We’re convinced we can learn a lot from comparative analyses of processes and results.” Or in other words, from benchmarking. “The view from outside that the external consultants bring has always helped move us forward.”

Dereymaeker emphasizes the crucial importance of a good working relationship. “If you don’t have all the employees on board, even the best-intentioned projects will come to nothing in actual practice,” he says. Porsche Consulting is therefore guided by the following principle: “We get everyone involved—from shop-floor staff to top-level board members.” To put Boehringer Ingelheim's strategies into practice, the management consultancy recommended using “ambassadors” to spread ideas throughout the corporation and encourage people to join in because they themselves think sustainability is a good thing. “These and other measures have enabled us to move developments along faster,” observes Dereymaeker.

Plans for the near future include expanding the Green Fleet project and optimizing external reporting, such as for ESG with the requisite detailed indicators. “Sustainable actions pay off, both internally and externally,” says Dereymaeker. “They enhance your reputation among customers, business partners, employees, governments, institutions, and other stakeholders—or in other words, with the partners who are critical to your company’s long-term success.”

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