

Case Study

Retail: Mountain Equipment Co-op



Mountain Equipment Co-op (MEC), Canada's largest retailer of outdoor clothing and equipment, has stores in seven cities across Canada and annual sales of \$162 million. The Vancouver store at 130 West Broadway opened in 1971.

Waste Reduction and Recycling

It costs MEC \$154 a tonne to landfill materials but only \$39 a tonne to recycle. This difference of \$115 a tonne created a strong incentive to reduce disposal and increase recycling. Measures included the following:

- Performed an in-store waste audit
- Obtained recycling/disposal statistics from haulers
- Set targets to reduce large-volume wastes
- Improved signage to prevent contamination of recycled materials
- Educated staff.

Packaging is 80 per cent of the waste stream, so MEC worked with buyers to reduce packaging and ensure that materials reaching their stores are recyclable.

The result: waste reduction of 91 per cent, with stores saving \$115 on every tonne diverted from the landfill.

Paper Purchasing

MEC is committed to reducing overall fibre consumption by 30 per cent by 2005 through increased conservation and efficiency at head office and stores.

MEC has reduced fibre use to save resources and prevent pollution:

- Switched to tree-free paper. Information tags on products are made of 100 per cent tree-free, chlorine-free paper made of sugar cane and hemp by-products.
- MEC preferably selects products made from reclaimed or post-consumer recycled material, independently certified second-growth forest sources, agricultural waste fibre and chlorine-free products.
- In a plan to eliminate old-growth fibre from the paper they use, MEC is investigating fibre sources with its paper suppliers.

Catalogues

To encourage the elimination of paper catalogues, MEC promotes the use of an on-line catalogue and offers remote sales over the phone or internet. MEC then minimizes the environmental impact of printed catalogues by using the highest possible amount of total recycled paper content (both pre- and post-consumer waste). The resulting catalogues are made from reduced weight, recycled content, chlorine-free paper and printed with vegetable-based inks. For example, the Winter 2003 catalogue has:

- A cover of 35 per cent post-consumer recycled content
- Pages of chlorine-free New Leaf brand paper incorporating 30 per cent post-consumer recycled content and reduced tree fibre.

With a print run of about 750,000 catalogues, MEC's use of post-consumer waste fibre alone saves 1720 trees, 85,178 pounds of solid waste, 343,272 gallons of water, 1.433 million BTUs and 111,252 pounds of greenhouse gases.



Organic Cotton

Conventional cotton uses huge amounts of chemical pesticides and exacts an environmental toll on air, water and soil. Organic cotton uses earth-friendly alternatives to toxic pesticides and synthetic chemicals, avoiding synthetic fertilizers, pesticides, herbicides, insecticides and defoliants. With member support, MEC has played a leadership role in the use of organic cotton: after converting to 100 per cent organic cotton, cotton garment sales have increased.

Energy Efficiency and Greenhouse Gas Reductions

In 2001 MEC produced a baseline report measuring its greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions as preparation for reductions. It found that the Vancouver store, for example, produces annually 13.9 tonnes of CO2 equivalent and uses 589.9 GJ of energy at a supplied cost of \$7,596 per 1000 square metres of floor space. MEC will use this information to set targets for reductions. The Vancouver store has invested in a lighting retrofit to increase the energy efficiency of the building.

Alternative Transportation

MEC is among the Top 10 Companies for employee participation in the annual Commuter Challenge. MEC's Vancouver store is located close to bike routes and transit lines, making it easy for both staff and members to use alternative transportation. Employees don't get free parking, but are offered change rooms, secure bicycle storage, loaner bike tools and bike maintenance courses. For after-work hikes and other staff activities, MEC encourages car-pooling. MEC also sponsors alternative transportation projects:

- Bike Month 2001 (BEST)
- UBC September Bike Festival 2001 (AMS Bike Co-op)
- The School Cycling Policy Guide (Ontario Cycling Association).

Community Programs

MEC donates 0.4 per cent of its gross annual sales to its Environment Fund. The Fund supports conservation and wilderness protection projects. In 2001 the fund contributed \$430,269 to 66 non-profit organizations all across Canada, including \$105,000 to land acquisitions for conservation. In other ways as well, MEC plays an active role in the community in support of self-propelled wilderness recreation, wilderness conservation and responsible use of the outdoors. Here are some examples:

- A key participant in B.C. Rivers Day
- Annual river cleanups in the Lower Mainland
- Sponsor and participant in the Vancouver and Banff International Mountain Films Festivals

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