

Press release – no embargo

South African companies recognise risk, but lack concrete action

The second edition of The Environmental Handbook, launched recently, suggests that while some leading South African companies are beginning to recognise the gravity of environmental risks and challenges, this has not yet translated into enough concrete action by the corporate sector.

Cape Town, 02 September, 2010. The world over, the impact of our economic activities on an increasingly unstable natural environment is of paramount concern. As climate change impacts start to take effect, and as a number of natural resource constraints become more apparent, the business operating sphere is on the verge of dramatic change. The second edition of *The Environmental Handbook* – published by Trialogue and recently launched at functions in Johannesburg and Cape Town – analyses corporate actions and aims to deepen the debate on one of the most critical issues of our time.

Morné du Plessis, chief executive of the World Wide Fund for Nature South Africa, warns in the publication's guest foreword that not only is South Africa one of the highest emitters of carbon, but it is also a water-stressed country. Says du Plessis: "In addition to climate change, water availability is one of the most decisive factors that will affect economic development – at current consumption rates our demand will outstrip supply by 2025. Business can either respond by putting its head in the sand, or face the facts and view the new economic climate as an opportunity for job creation, innovation and technological advancement".

In her editorial introduction, handbook editor, Heather de Wet, explains that the handbook focuses on the emerging green economy and the associated regulatory and operational shifts that businesses face in the coming years. "Clearly, companies face serious challenges in both curtailing their environmental footprints and adapting to a fast-changing operating context. But how seriously is this multi-faceted challenge taken? Are companies engaging with the practicalities of greenhouse gas mitigation and adaptation? Is the growing problem of water scarcity on the corporate radar? What are companies actually doing to reduce their environmental impacts?"

Some of the answers emerge from Trialogue's primary field research for the handbook, conducted with 100 top corporates around South Africa. The research showed that rather than moral imperative, commercial risk or reputation, the main factors driving corporate South Africa's environmental response were compliance with international standards and with South African legislation and regulations. Respondents considered energy to be the most important environmental category, followed by waste and water. Issues such as air pollution, land stewardship and biodiversity resources enjoyed much lower priority amongst South African corporates. Concludes De Wet: "Our research found that while many companies are beginning to recognise the gravity of environmental risks and challenges, this growing consciousness has not yet translated into across-the-board action by the corporate sector".

The handbook also highlights corporate environmental behaviour as reported in South Africa's mainstream media. For this purpose, Trialogue partnered with Media Tenor South Africa to analyse the extent of negative and positive environmental coverage in the media. According to Media Tenor's Wadim Schreiner, the environment is no longer a soft issue. "In our experience, the environment is progressively becoming hard news that is relevant for a wide range of influential company stakeholders. The lesson is that companies should do all they can to entrench their reputations as reliable, responsible citizens, rather than relying on 'spin' to shore up their reputation when the chips are down."

Many further insights in the handbook come courtesy of a range of guest feature articles, thought leadership pieces and expert opinions – from Prof. Anthony Turton of TouchStone Resources, Dr. Heidi-Jayne Hawkins of Conservation International, Saliem Fakir of WWF-SA, Jonathon Hanks of Incite Sustainability, Pancho Ndebele of Water Neutral, Keith Anderson of eWasa, and many others.

"Leading companies are beginning to sit up and take note of the gravity of environmental risks and opportunities", says De Wet. "It is clear that the early movers in this post-industrial era will be the global business leaders of the 21st century."

Du Plessis concludes that continuing with business as usual will be fatal for our economy. "And *The Environmental Handbook* is an excellent entry point into the world of sustainable business. It should be on the desk of any CEO who envisions a low-carbon economy for South Africa and a climate-safe future for all."

The Environmental Handbook, 2nd edition, retails for R275 (incl. Vat) and can be ordered via the Trialogue website www.trialogue.co.za, or send an email to info@trialogue.co.za for more information.

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Note to the editor:

Trialogue is one of a handful of consultancies in South Africa that focuses exclusively on corporate responsibility issues. The company has over ten years of experience in this area, having entered the field at a time when sustainability, corporate social responsibility (CSR), corporate citizenship and corporate social investment (CSI) were new concepts that were not well understood by the corporate sector. Trialogue consults to companies about their sustainability- and CSI-related practices and reporting, and disseminates knowledge through a range of its own publications, including *The Trialogue Sustainability Review*, *The Sustainability Handbook*, *The CSI Handbook* and *The Environmental Handbook*.