

## Apple computer's green initiatives

Written by EarthTalk®, E - The Environmental Magazine  
Monday, 05 May 2014 15:06

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**Dear EarthTalk: Apple just put out a big PR campaign about its sustainability initiatives. Has the company made real progress in this regard or is this just more corporate "greenwashing?" And how are the other big tech companies addressing their carbon footprints?**  
*-- Billy A., Oakland, CA*

Long criticized for its lack of commitment to sustainability—from supporting the dangerous mining of precious resources and exploiting factory workers to powering its data centers with energy derived from coal and not taking back products for recycling—Apple has really worked on turning things around over the past couple of years. Indeed, just this past month the company announced that 94 percent of its corporate facilities and 100 percent of its data centers now operate on power from renewable sources.

Environmentalists first took notice that serious change was afoot at Apple in May 2013 when the company brought in former Obama Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) administrator Lisa Jackson to head its corporate environmental initiative. Since then, the company has unveiled plans showing how its new corporate headquarters—currently under construction in Cupertino, California—will use 30 percent less energy than an equivalent conventional building while playing host to some 7,000 carbon-sequestering trees. Apple also reports that it has decreased the material required to produce its iPhones, iPads, iPods and Macs. A new iPad Air, for instance, uses a third less material overall by weight than the original iPad. And all of the company's retail stores will now take back any Apple products for free recycling—U.S. and U.K. consumers can even earn gift cards for turning in old iPhones, iPads and computers.

Of course, Apple still has work to do. The nonprofit Friends of the Earth has been on the company's case to agree to a plan that will reign in the human and environmental toll of destructive tin mining in Indonesia and elsewhere. Tin is a major component of the solder in smart phones and other electronics and the popularity of such items has pushed miners to extremes and is linked to the destruction of tropical rainforests, coral reefs and commercial fisheries. Apple sent a team of investigators to the Indonesian islands responsible for producing some 30 percent of the world's commercially available tin, but the company has yet to commit to any changes in the way it sources this increasingly valuable raw material.

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As for other tech/Internet companies, Greenpeace has been assessing and tracking environmental performance of the big players for more than a decade. "The Internet we love, and the companies that run it are at a crossroads in terms of where their energy comes from," reports the group. "Many of these companies have already chosen the road to a green internet and a sustainable future." Some of the best performers besides Apple include Facebook, Google, Salesforce, Rackspace and Box, each of which has committed to 100 percent renewable energy.

Greenpeace isn't as bullish on Twitter, Pinterest, Tumblr and Amazon, each of which relies heavily on coal-fired power sources for their data centers and other operations, but still says. "If Amazon and others want to stay innovative and relevant, it's high time they made the switch to the abundant, sustainable, renewable energy of today." Concerned consumers can sign Greenpeace's online #ClickClean petition asking these big players to step up and commit to renewable energy and environmentally responsible operations.

**CONTACTS:** Apple Environmental Responsibility, [www.apple.com/environment](http://www.apple.com/environment); Greenpeace, [www.greenpeace.org](http://www.greenpeace.org)

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