

Evaluation by a Third Person

Comments on the **ÆON Environmental and Social Report 2003**



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Starting from this FY 2003 report, the title has changed from “ÆON Environmental Report” to “ÆON Environmental and Social Report” with a subtitle, “Sustainability Report.” It is well-known that the term “sustainability” was used in the UN Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED) held in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, 10 years ago. Since the progressive depletion of resources around the world and destruction of the natural environment caused by mass production and mass consumption in the 20th century are great risks to the future survival of mankind, the need to create a sustainable economy and society that achieve balance between environmental conservation and development was advocated. Furthermore, in the World Summit on Sustainable Development (WSSD) held in Johannesburg, South Africa, in 2002, there were calls for not only environmental conservation, but also changes in the social systems.

I highly value this FY 2003 report as a clear expression of ÆON’s attitude to place importance on not only environmental conservation, but also social contribution, in response to such a global trend. The particularly notable point is that ÆON emphasizes its policy to act “together with customers” more strongly than in its previous reports. It is important to aim at open management, develop reliable products, and engage in social contribution activities and environmental conservation activities “together with customers.”

The most effective way for ÆON, whose main operation is retailing, to contribute to building a sustainable society is to

provide safe and environment-friendly products to customers and help customers choose environment-friendly, recycling-oriented lifestyles. In order for customers to make such choices, the employees at the stores must have sufficient knowledge and be able to provide explanations to customers as required.

Every year, I visit ÆON stores to inspect how the ÆON’s Basic Principles are actually permeated at the stores, and this year was no exception (though it was only the Kyoto-Rakunan Store this year).

I find the number of TOPVALU products – ÆON’s private brand focusing on safety, environmental conservation, and recycling – increasing every year. They take up a large part of the store space and are often displayed at very eye-catching locations. The employees at the store recognize those products as their private brand, and I also heard that they were selling extremely well. The TOPVALU brand, consisting of such sub-brands as “Kyokan Sengen,” “Green Eye” and “SELECT,” is designed fashionably, so I asked some customers whether they paid attention to the environmental friendliness of the product or safety of the food in choosing TOPVALU. As a result, I could not get clear answers for clothing, but I found customers selecting TOPVALU foods for their “safety.”

I also witnessed the store’s positive efforts to reduce/process waste and collect food trays and other resources.

From the viewpoint of an “Environmental and Social Report,” I also highly regard ÆON’s effort to introduce level (barrier-free) passages usable by wheelchairs at stores, which appeared for the first time in this year’s report. The store I inspected was also a friendly, barrier-free store.

Evaluating ÆON’s environmental activities for my fifth year, I am very happy to see ÆON’s sustainable management policy gradually being put into practice at the stores. I expect the group to further strengthen employee education and achieve even closer communication with customers in the future.

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