

Comments on ÆON's Environmental Activities in FY 2001



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This is the fourth year since I was first invited to evaluate the environmental conservation activities of ÆON as a third party. Even before my involvement, ÆON was already a forerunner in the retail industry in tackling environmental issues. This was due to the enthusiasm of the top management to incorporate ideals of environmental conservation into their management principles. However, just four years ago these management principles were not necessarily reflected to the sales floors. For example, the environmentally conscious TOPVALU brand was displayed at an inconspicuous corner and some of the salespersons were not familiar with these products. There were even stores where customers had to go out of their way to look for the collection boxes for recycling trays and cans.

With the ÆON companies acquiring the ISO 14001 certification in quick succession in the last two years, and at the same time undertaking a systematic approach to environmental management, I came to realize that ÆON's environmental policies have been put into practice at every sales corner. When I checked some of the stores this year, I saw on display a greater number of recycled products under the ÆON private brand TOPVALU and larger sales areas for these products in the center of the sales floors. The TOPVALU Green Eye brand, farm produce grown organically or cultivated with reduced use of agricultural chemicals, seemed to have a more extensive lineup of offerings. The salespersons were also recommending the food label to their customers with confidence and pride. However, there seems to be a room for improvement in terms of the provision of information to customers. For example, customers may want to know what kinds of products are known as TOPVALU Kyokan Sengen products. The names of the products seemed difficult for the customers to understand and the printed explanations were sometimes too small to be recognized. On a more positive note, recycling collection boxes were installed at several conspicuous locations and the collection volumes had increased. Although the movement to bring one's shopping bags or baskets to minimize the use of plastic shopping bags has not yet achieved the anticipated result, immense progress has been made when compared to past years.

Even if the consumers want to purchase safe food products and recycled products that exert less of an impact on the environment and reduce waste, their wish cannot be fulfilled if there are not enough items. On the other hand, not all consumers have deep concerns for safety

and the environment. Within this context, the retailers play an important role, as a middleman between the product manufacturers and consumers, with the dual responsibilities of meeting the consumers' needs and raising the awareness of the consumers. In order to build a safe and environmentally conscious society together with the consumers, the retailers must formulate and implement business policies for environmental conservation that cover all stages of product's life, from its development to waste disposal.

I give high marks to the fact that all ÆON stores are making steady progress, from the stage of formulating environmental policies to that of putting them into practice. To ensure the proper course of action, it is desirable to strengthen the environmental education of employees. At present, environmental education seems to be offered only in the form of short-term seminars. I think it will prove more effective to have training that requires the active participation of employees based on their actual experience at the stores.

ÆON has received the "Corporate Social Contribution Award Co-existence with Society Prize" from the Asahi Shimbun Foundation. I have a great respect for ÆON, which not only engages in the sales of goods but also joins forces with customers to carry out volunteer and fund-raising activities. I also have a great expectation for ÆON to continue to be a good corporate citizen. Furthermore, the environmental report of ÆON for the last fiscal year was commended at the Environmental Report Awards 2001. As someone involved in the preparation of that report, I was extremely happy. I hope that ÆON will continue to provide information to the society and strengthen its communication activities.

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Checking the location of a collection box



Talking with a salesperson to find out her environmental awareness



Verifying the measures taken to ensure the safety of beef