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Apple Responds to Shareholders Announces “greener” policy including recycling goals

SAN FRANCISCO, May 3, 2007 -- Apple Inc. became the third major U.S. computer brand to set public take back goals for recycling old computers at the request of shareholders led by As You Sow Foundation. A letter announcement by Apple CEO Steve Jobs, on Apple’s website, comes a week before a shareholder resolution asking the company to report on its recycling efforts, filed by As You Sow on behalf of the Educational Foundation of America, comes to a vote.

Jobs announced new aggressive multi-year recycling goals aimed at significantly increasing the company’s electronic equipment recycling volume. As You Sow has pushed computer makers for several years to take responsibility for 48 million computers that are discarded annually. Electronic waste poses a huge disposal problem because computers contain toxic heavy metals. Improper disposal in developing countries harms human health and the environment.

Dell Inc. and Hewlett Packard previously set take back goals at the request of As You Sow and other socially conscious shareholders.

“We are pleased that Apple has joined Dell and HP in setting aggressive goals to take back their old computer systems” said Conrad MacKerron, director of As You Sow’s Corporate Social Responsibility Program. “Returning computer equipment directly to producers’ recycling systems, where safe disposal can be verified, greatly reduces the potential for unsafe dumping and disposal of toxic elements in developing countries.”

As You Sow has worked with Dell, Hewlett-Packard and now Apple to develop a metric to track and measure returned units based on previous sales. The average life of a computer was estimated at 7 years. The volume of computer equipment recycled is compared to sales figures from 7 years ago. In 2006, Apple estimates it took back 9.5% of computers sold seven years ago, a figure close to that of Dell. Under the goals announced today, Apple plans to triple this percentage to 28% by 2010, which would move it significantly ahead of its competitors.

As You Sow met with Jobs and CFO Peter Oppenheimer in February to discuss the need for aggressive take back recovery goals and other improvements in computer recycling and chemical policies.

“We applaud Apple’s decision to share details about their achievements and goals with stakeholders,” said Nishita Bakshi, research director of As You Sow’s Corporate Social Responsibility Program. “This is indeed an important policy change from their past reticence to share information and will facilitate a more open dialogue and discussion with the company.”

However, shareholders expect Apple to do more in the coming months to match industry leaders. Dell, for example takes back any of its branded equipment for free. Apple provides free recycling only with a new computer purchase. As You Sow is hopeful that Apple will match or better Dell in offering creative incentives to customers for recycling old and obsolete equipment globally.