



## Inspired to Stay Sustainable: Progress Toward Our Goals

What does it take to address climate change, sustainability, environmental, and human health impacts in a company that holds more than 20 companies under its umbrella, employing more than 8,700 and available in 80+ countries?

For HNI Corporation, under which Allsteel and Gunlocke are two of its furniture brands, it began by bringing together a global HNI sustainability team to assess the current state and establish future goals for the enterprise.

Of the long-term goals of HNI, three in particular have become an initial focus: bringing operations to zero waste, driving carbon reduction strategies, and assessing materials for environmental and human health impacts.

### Zero Waste

Much like the recycling process, furniture is designed and manufactured behind the scenes. But just because the specifiers and end users don't see how it's made, that doesn't mean it doesn't impact them. For eco-conscious consumers, knowledge that the products they pick are created as sustainability as possible can be a deciding factor in their office choices.

Determining a strategy for zero waste started with recognizing that Allsteel's Muscatine, IA., facility is one of the largest in the corporation. With nearly a million square feet, the facility houses the production lines for Allsteel's systems panels, desking, benching, and tables product lines. The product lines require a variety of materials to be processed, leading to many different types of waste and therefore, a multitude of waste and recycling streams.

To tackle this project, the Corporate Social Responsibility team began by understanding what types of waste were being produced in the Muscatine location. Several waste audits were performed where the team began to formulate a list of waste materials, where each was being generated in the plant, and if the materials were able to be recycled.



The types of waste identified included particleboard, laminate, glass, powder paint, fabrics, metals, plastics, cardboard, and others. From there, the team followed the waste streams a step further, to industrial re-use facilities, recycling facilities, or landfills.

To take their understanding a step further, the sustainability team reached out to their waste management partners to gain insight into what was being sent to landfills versus diversion to recycling centers, then performed their own hands-on research in the form of "dumpster diving" at the Muscatine location. Pulling and sorting waste helped them to better understand what recycling processes were working, and where further response was needed.

The next step was to figure out which processes were in place already, what was working well in diverting landfill waste, and where efforts should be focused. From there, the team worked to develop standard process explanations and trainings for facility members to help them understand what and how to recycle. Additionally, the team has been working with upstream suppliers to control the amount of packaging materials entering the plant, as well as searching for opportunities to reuse certain waste materials in other product applications.

At this time, they hope to achieve at least 95-percent diversion by the end of 2020. Once finalized, the zero-waste process will be rolled out throughout other HNI Corporation facilities.

### **Carbon Strategies**

To help address carbon reductions, the Corporate Social Responsibility team began by researching how to truly move the needle. The team found that the best solution was to rely on the research from the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change and align their carbon reduction goals with the Paris Agreement. HNI signed onto the Science-Based Target Initiative (SBTI) in March 2019 and began assessing their carbon emissions to understand what their science-based emissions reduction target should be. Targets are considered “science-based” if they are in line with the latest climate science to meet the Paris Agreement. Adopted targets must help limit global warming to well-below 2° above pre-industrial levels and pursue efforts to limit global warming to 1.5°C.

Using CDP climate disclosure data, HNI worked with a consultant to come up with draft science based targets that will be submitted to the SBTI for target validation.

Once the draft targets were established, HNI developed plans to reduce carbon emissions and achieve the targets. Currently those plans involve facility lighting upgrades, purchasing renewable energy credits and carbon offsets, and working with supply chain and distribution partners to tackle emissions reductions from the manufacture and distribution of HNI's materials.

### **Assessing Materials for Environmental and Human Health Impacts**

Lastly, the Corporate Social Responsibility team at HNI Corporation has been taking a deep look into the materials that are used in their products to better understand the environmental and human health impacts. This relates to HNI's 2025 goal, which is to evaluate 100 percent of their materials and chemical substances in products for human and ecosystem impacts and attempt to minimize those impacts through Design for the Environment practices.



To understand the environmental impacts, HNI has been creating life cycle assessments and Environmental Product Declarations for their leveraged materials, those used across many of their brands. These materials include particleboard, steel, aluminum, and plastics. The assessment of these materials helps HNI understand more about the carbon intensity, water intensity, and overall emissions generated from the manufacturing of their materials and ultimately, their products. The generation of Environmental Product Declarations helps customers understand these impacts, too.

Allsteel and Gunlocke were the first in the industry to equate select category indicators to relatable concepts, making it easy to understand a product's potential impact. For example, the Global Warming Potential is equated to the number of miles driven in a typical passenger vehicle. Water Use is equated to the number of cycles run in a dishwasher and Primary Energy Demand is equated to the number of days required to operate a refrigerator.

The human health impacts are being assessed through in-depth chemical research. HNI is partnering with their suppliers to capture information about the chemicals in their materials, down to a 100ppm threshold, or 0.01% of the weight of a product. Evaluating to this threshold for a typical product requires assessing everything from the major materials down to small pieces of hardware and lightweight finishes, like paints and coatings.



With this information, HNI plans to work with their suppliers to identify and remove potentially harmful chemicals from their supply chains. The findings will be shared through industry disclosure certifications and declarations.

HNI's ultimate goal through this work is to identify materials that are safe to use and have no adverse environmental or human health impacts. The team is currently working to launch new Environmental Product Declarations for Allsteel's Stride Panels, Terrace Panels, Approach Caseworks, Involve Wood Storage, and Gunlocke's Silea Laminate and Veneer Caseworks. Material transparency research is also underway.

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