

A yardstick for sustainable business

Winners of the Singapore Sustainability Awards will act as a benchmark for other organisations aiming to go green. **BY FRANCIS KAN**

TEN private and public sector organisations were recognised for their commitment to sustainable business practices at the Singapore Sustainability Awards (SSA) last month.

The winners were chosen for their environment friendly operations and performance management systems, corporate social responsibility, innovation, and adoption of green technology.

Given out annually by the Singapore Business Federation (SBF), the awards fall into two categories: the Sustainable Business Awards (SBA) and the Green Technology Awards (GTA). (See sidebar)

Said Ho Meng Kit, chief executive officer of SBF: "The Singapore Sustainability Awards has recognised many extraordinary organisations with inspiring business practices and green products over the last six years. It is heartening to see more and more businesses coming forward to say that sustainability is key to safeguarding their long-term competitiveness."

"We hope that our 10 recipients this year, with their exemplary sustainable practices and green solutions, will inspire others to reach higher and go further in making their businesses responsible towards society and the environment."

Elmich, an engineering solutions company, received the "top honour" title under the GTA Small and Medium Enterprise category. The company has contributed to major projects around the world, achieving many green building certifications and winning various architectural awards.

Said SBF in a statement: "Elmich presented a well thought-out sustainability plan and stood out with their exceptional business strategy implementation. They also demonstrated a strong commitment to sustainable



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business practices through their value proposition, with sustainability incorporated across four areas – people, processes, products and planet."

Three others also won awards under the GTA category: Gashub Technology, Neutrinós Engineering and Canon Singapore.

Six winners emerged in the SBA category: Ardentec Singapore, Buckman Laboratories, the Maritime and Port Authority of Singapore, Marina Bay Sands, Kimberly-Clark Singapore and

Wilmar International.

Said Benny Zin, chief operating officer and vice president of conventions & exhibitions, Marina Bay Sands: "Sustainability is ingrained in Marina Bay Sands' corporate DNA and it is such an honour to be recognised at the Sustainable Business Awards 2015. This win will inspire the team to further develop innovative green solutions for our clients and at the same time, give back meaningfully to the community that we operate in."

best-in-class green technology solutions, meeting sustainability needs of the business, environment and society. Some of these companies will be recognised today for their contributions," said Masagos Zulkifli, Minister for the Environment and Water Resources, who was the guest of honour at the event.

He added: "I hope that more firms will start thinking about incorporating green technologies into their business practices, and create a more sustainable future for us."

In conjunction with SSA 2015, SBF also collaborated with Nanyang Technological University's Nanyang Business School for the first time to produce the case study handbook titled "Scaling New Heights for Sustainability Excellences".

The book features the 2014 SSA winners and their sustainability journey, providing real-life examples and insights into operating a sustainable business. As part of SBF's efforts to promote sustainable business practices, the books are available for self-collection at no charge at SBF's premises.

SINGAPORE SUSTAINABILITY LABEL

Meanwhile, a new accreditation scheme for green businesses called the Singapore Sustainability Label was officially unveiled by Mr Masagos at the awards event held at the Grand Copthorne Waterfront on Oct 21.

The label is given out by SBF and complements the SSA by providing an additional platform for organisations to benchmark their good practices. "It is meant to recognise and encourage companies which may not meet the full requirements for the awards, but possess a strong potential to improve," said Mr Masagos.

"The label will also benefit companies that are looking to venture into international markets with strict regulatory standards, as it will enable companies to differentiate themselves and stand out in the region."

He noted that the government launched the Sustainable Singapore Blueprint 2015 in November last year as a national guide for sustainability. The blueprint provides an outline of the national vision to create a more liveable and sustainable future for Singaporeans through a multi-pronged approach.

For example, one plan is to create living labs to test-bed ideas that will improve lives while conserving the environment.

Said Mr Masagos: "In fact, given our high-density urban setting, Singapore is well placed to serve as a platform for companies and research organisations to develop solutions for environmental sustainability."

Green champions

CURRENTLY into its sixth year, the Singapore Sustainability Awards (SSA) showcases the most commendable sustainable practices and green solutions among organisations in Singapore and acts as a yardstick for enterprises to benchmark against the standards of top companies. The SSA has two categories:

■ Sustainable Business Awards

To recognise excellence in the "Adopter" community – organisations with demonstrable implementation of sustainable practice encompassing economic, social and environmental dimensions to achieve a sustainable future for all.

■ Green Technology Awards

To recognise excellence in the "Enabler" community – organisations that provide green technology solutions to meet the sustainability needs of businesses, environment and society.

GREEN TECHNOLOGY AWARDS: TOP HONOUR

A track record of innovation

Elmich has invested heavily in developing sustainable products that reduce costs and save the environment

By Sue-Ann Chia

AFTER operating his waterproofing business for a decade, Alan Lee spotted an opportunity to develop a new line of business. The founder of green technology firm Elmich saw that many buildings in Singapore had used gravel to drain out rainwater.

But, at the time in the early 1990s, another new product had come onto the market: a plastic drainage cell that would do the same job as gravel, but in a much more efficient manner.

"It was a no brainer. Between 300kg of gravel and a 2.5kg plastic drainage cell, clearly one was the better choice," he says. With a lighter load, there is more freedom for architects and engineers to design buildings, he notes.

"We were the first in Asia and Singapore to introduce the product to the market. It took time but now no one uses gravel any more."

This is the type of product Mr Lee considers to be sustainable: one that increases efficiency, whether by using less energy, resources or manpower. "It has to make sense. Otherwise why have products that say they are sustainable?" he says.

Over time, the firm – which was founded in 1985 and now has offices in 27 countries – has introduced other products that have made a difference in the built environment sector in terms of saving the planet as well as resources for the firm.

Another example is the boardwalk linking Sentosa to VivoCity. Initially, the plans had stipulated concrete stumps to support the structure. But Elmich's proposal was to put pedestals made of plastic that could be fit



Elmich's proposal to put pedestals made of plastic rather than concrete to support the Sentosa Boardwalk saves manpower, materials and costs

to measure according to the height required to support the boardwalk.

"Concrete was heavy and you needed to cast it, and it had to be perfectly cast. With our product you could easily adjust when required," he says. "It saves manpower, materials and costs. That's sustainable."

Elmich was given the Top Honour at the Green Technology Awards this year for its contributions to the industry. The company has put in great effort to develop innovative products, holding more than 130 patents.

It has also ensured that the firms it works with buy only from its approved suppliers, ensuring both quality as well as sustainability.

"As virtually all our products are made from recycled plastics which are quite abundant, we have been able to contain the prices to levels significantly lower than non-green alternatives," says Mr Lee. The company

has five engineers among its staff of about 40 who attend and can help fix problems for their clients.

Mr Lee also notes that in many European countries such as Germany and Switzerland, environmental sustainability is a major consideration and customers are prepared to pay more for these products. Here, there is less willingness for customers to pay unless the products are "good and cheap".

"One of our clients, a German multinational, gave us nearly perfect scores in their assessment of suppliers, except for one category: price," he says. "They said the price can be a bit better. We got eight out of 10. That's pretty good I think."

Still, Mr Lee believes that the sustainable way of doing business has become mainstream and bodes well for companies like his. "This is no flash in the pan. This way of doing business is here to stay."