

Is “Water Positive” the next “Net-Zero”?

Water Positive initiatives, similar to Net-Zero, can have demonstrable positive impacts on the environment, climate, health, and society.

UNITED STATES, May 5, 2021 /EINPresswire.com/ -- Is “Water Positive” the next “Net-Zero”?

The concept of greenhouse gases, global warming, climate change, and the goal of carbon neutrality, or net-zero emissions, is now part of the common lexicon.

It was only five years ago that 197 countries adopted the Paris Agreement to optimistically reduce emissions and limit the global temperature increase between 1.5 and 2.0 degrees Celsius. Since the signing, many countries and regions have committed to achieving a net-zero carbon footprint (Sweden 2045, Canada 2050, UK/Europe 2050, China 2060), and dozens of global corporations and cities have pledged net-zero emissions by 2050 or sooner. The Paris Agreement has also assisted in accelerating the energy transition (from fossil to green) and turbocharged the carbon offset and credit trading market.

A new buzzword related to water preservation is starting to gain momentum, a concept that could have a meaningful positive impact on the climate, environment, and water scarcity over the next five years.

Large global corporations have pledged net-zero targets, and some corporates in high water usage industries (agriculture, technology, consumer products, energy) have started to release plans to become “Water Positive.” This is where a corporate contributes more water to the ecosystem than it consumes. Water Positive initiatives reduce water stress, minimize wastewater pollution, and provide access to safe drinking water.

Several corporations, like Microsoft (2030 target), Intel (2030 target), BP (2035 target), GAP (2050 target), IKEA (2030 target), and Heineken (2030 target), are leading the way with strategies to restructure operations, develop new projects, and collaborate with partners to achieve Water Positive targets.

To address water scarcity and become Water Positive, McKinsey & Company recommends three spheres of influence: direct operations, supply chain, and basin health. Corporate systems, processes, technology, and equipment, used to source, process, treat, and discharge water, will need to be reviewed for redesign or replacement. Corporates can use their influence on partnerships to promote water resilience in regions with heightened water risk and collaborate

with suppliers to implement water-efficient solutions.

Directly investing, or indirectly via alliance partners, into innovative projects and new technology (such as using solar hydropanels to absorb water vapor from the air) can also ensure more water is returned to basins than used. Corporates can regionally target investments to address highly depleted basins or provide clean drinking water for disadvantaged communities.

Microsoft, as an example, is investing in water reduction and replenishment technologies across its global sites. Microsoft campuses and offices will reuse treated wastewater and harvested rainwater for flush fixtures. Data centers will use zero water for cooling when available. Microsoft is also partnering with water.org and other NGOs to ensure “more than 1.5 million people have access to clean drinking and sanitation water.”

Also supporting the Water Positive effort is the CEO-led Water Resilience Coalition, that “aims to elevate global water stress to the top of the corporate agenda and preserve the world’s freshwater resources.” Member companies have pledged to achieve a measurable and net positive impact in water-stressed basins and raise the global ambition of water resilience through public and corporate outreach. Some of the member companies include Cargill, Diageo, Dow, IHG Hotels & Resorts, and Starbucks.

Stakeholder pressure has assisted in enhancing corporate transparency and reporting on carbon reduction initiatives. However, compared to net-zero reporting, how a corporation measures and reports its water management performance to stakeholders is still in its infancy. The Governance & Accountability Institute (G&A) reported that 65% of companies responded directly to the Carbon Disclosure (CDP) climate change survey, with only 46% responding to the CDP Water Security survey.

Many large corporates have communicated ambitious net-zero targets. Corporates, particularly in heavy water use industries, also need to implement equally ambitious targets to reduce and replenish water to have a holistic climate change strategy. Ultimately, the goal should be to become a positive contributor to the water ecosystem – a global Water Positive steward.

The author

James Rees has over 25 years of international experience developing and executing corporate growth, transformation, and transaction strategies. James has worked both as a trusted professional advisor and senior business operator. Over the past six years, James assisted in scaling a water technology business from a minimal viable product to a commercialized offering in the US.

James Rees
Eaglehawk Advisory
[email us here](#)

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