In its annual Sustainability Report, Swedish retail giant H&M said 2015 saw important steps taken towards achieving an economically, socially and environmentally sustainable business.

“I am really proud of what H&M has achieved and the positive impact we are making. We are leading the way today within several sustainability areas and I want us to continue to raise the bar,” said the company’s CEO, Karl-Johan Persson about last year’s performance.

According to the company’s figures, H&M’s use of sustainably sourced materials has grown steadily year on year, and now represents 20% of the total material use. Organic cotton, recycled cotton and Better Cotton made up close to one third of H&M’s cotton use in 2015, taking the company closer to its goal to only use cotton from sustainable sources by 2020.

The recycled cotton came from the brand’s collection initiatives, which collected over 12,000 tonnes of garments in stores last year, while recycled polyester was made with 90 million PET bottles. With this figure, H&M is now one of the biggest users of recycled polyester in the world.

The international retailer also increased its share of renewable electricity in its own facilities to 78% of its total global electricity use, compared to 27% in 2014. This also helped reduced the total CO2 emission by 56% in the period.

**Strategic partnerships**

As part of its continued work towards fair living wages, H&M signed a number of partnerships and collaborations in 2015, including a global framework agreement with IndustriALL Global Union and the Swedish trade union IF Metall to promote a dialogue between the employer and the employees at the supplier factories working with H&M.

The company also entered into a partnership with Ellen MacArthur Foundation to further develop its initiatives aimed at achieving a 100% circular economy.

“We have set the vision of becoming 100% circular. In close dialogue with experts and stakeholders we will set
time-bound milestones to reach this goal. This will take us closer to our goal; to lead the change towards fully circular and sustainable fashion”, says Anna Gedda, Head of Sustainability at H&M.

The brand, which aims to provide contemporary fashion to conscious consumers, said some of its challenges involve educating and developing mutual understanding with its suppliers, supporting collective bargaining to define fair living wages across the industry, and working towards improving its climate impact.

By Barbara Santamaria

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