People + Planet

Shared Momentum

Why net-zero progress gets stronger when organizations move together

Read 10 minutes

Reducing the carbon footprint of any organization that makes things is a journey requiring multiple decisions, from rethinking design, to selecting new materials, to considering alternative transportation options. We've learned that collaborating with global partners across the entire process is the best way to approach that challenge.

Amazon, for example, joined forces with Steelcase to reduce the carbon footprint of its office furniture. By seeking partners with similar net-zero goals and integrating carbon-reduction and material-improvement goals into supplier agreements, this collaboration established a new industry model for accelerating measurable environmental progress.

Amazon's Global Real Estate and Facilities team engaged with Steelcase through regular touchpoints to track progress and drive measurable reductions in the carbon footprint of Leap® and Steelcase Series® 1 seating products.

For Steelcase, the collaboration reflected and accelerated work already underway. It is a compelling reminder of how progress toward net zero gets stronger when more partners move in the same direction.

This philosophy guides our path to reach net zero across the value chain. The work extends across suppliers, Steelcase teams, dealers and customers because each part of the system shapes what becomes possible.

> Progress toward net zero takes shape through the work Steelcase is doing inside the business and with suppliers, dealers and customers, positively impacting people and the planet.

Where Steelcase is focusing its path to net zero

Our emissions data highlights our largest opportunity: reducing the embodied carbon of our products. Everything that we make produces a carbon footprint, but organizations can make choices that help reduce carbon emissions. It starts with supplier engagement, material choices and design decisions that shape impact before a product reaches customers. Lower-carbon operations matter too, driving investments such as the new solar array at the Steelcase plant in Kentwood, Michigan.

> Steelcase aims to reduce emissions across this broader system by more than 90% by 2050. We reported a 37% reduction in Scope 1 and 2 emissions from 2019 to 2025, with energy-efficiency metrics ahead of forecast.

How suppliers help move progress forward

The same signal Amazon sent by establishing its expectations and accountability measures is also shared with Steelcase suppliers: progress matters more when it is measured, shared and acted on. More than half of our suppliers, based on emissions levels, have set science-based targets, and an additional 10% have committed to setting them in the future.

The progress is significant because suppliers are tied to some of the hardest-to-reduce emissions, especially in material categories critical to furniture manufacturing. Clear expectations, support and shared resources help suppliers build the measurement capability needed to make progress over time.

> By working collaboratively with our suppliers, we are lowering scope 3 emissions, fostering a low-carbon supply chain and tracking progress through our supplier scorecard process.

Magic Steel, an affiliate of SteelSummit, a leading flat-rolled metals processor and distributor, makes that point tangible. Steel is a challenging material in commercial furniture because it is energy-intensive to produce and difficult to eliminate entirely.

As Ron Irlinger, Corporate Director of Environmental Health, Safety and Sustainability puts it, steel is something "we're always going to need," which makes the current challenge less about whether to use it and more about how to do it better. He says Steelcase has been one of the customers helping drive their environmental program forward, adding that customer expectations have justified deeper investment in the work. The partnership helped them adopt a structured approach, giving what Irlinger calls "that extra nudge" to begin measuring scope 3 emissions.

That is part of what supplier progress can look like in practice: not just compliance, but stronger measurement, reporting and improvement over time. Irlinger says customers increasingly want to know the numbers, but also what's being done to improve them.

Designing lower-impact materials together

Milliken & Company, a global leader in materials science and a Steelcase textile supplier, offers a glimpse of where continued collaboration on materials could lead next. Textiles produce carbon emissions during production and pose waste challenges at the end of use.

Cali Bowen, Textile Product Stewardship Analyst at Milliken explained how the market is shifting. "More and more organizations are prioritizing circular thinking," Bowen says. "It definitely requires everybody in the same boat, rowing in the same direction."

One future opportunity is chemically recycled polyester, which can return materials closer to their original quality and support a more circular loop than mechanical recycling alone. It points to the kind of lower-impact material innovation Steelcase and Milliken are working toward.

Where product and material choices make a difference

Steelcase recently adopted a Sustainable Product Design Framework, to build circularity into everyday decisions about materials, product design and end-of-use from the start of product development.

That work is already driving meaningful results: We doubled the recycled content across our key task chairs in the Americas, contributing to an average 35% reduction in embodied carbon across that portfolio.

Teams worked together to rethink how we choose and use the materials used in our products during the Sustainable Materials Summit.

Turning material insight into action

Steelcase teams also explored materials that account for the majority of the company's product carbon footprint. Teams gathered at the 2024 Sustainable Materials Summit — designers, engineers, supply chain experts, marketers and sustainability leaders — to examine common materials used most in products, including foam, plastics, metals and wood.

They explored ideas such as designing chairs without foam, using wood more efficiently, and finding lower-impact approaches to plastics and metals. The goal was not just to generate ideas, but to evaluate them through multiple lenses, including environmental impact, technical feasibility, business value and user appeal.

"The summit was a turning point, bringing together voices from across the company to think boldly and challenge assumptions," says Kaila Bryzgalski, Portfolio Manager, Product Sustainability Marketing. "It showed what's possible when we align around a shared goal and turn ideas into action."

From design principle to customer program

Circular by Steelcase is a business offering that addresses how to reduce carbon footprints after a product is already made. Built around reusing, repairing, remaking and recycling, the program helps customers extend product life, reduce waste and lower carbon impact through end-of-use services. It makes circularity more than a design principle. It becomes a practical way for customers to act on their own workplace and sustainability goals.

In France, Steelcase Remade helped the bank, Crédit Agricole d'Île-de-France, remanufacture 4,700 reception chairs across 273 branches rather than buy new to reduce waste, control costs and lower its carbon impact. For Karim Bedr, Head of Occupant Services, Security and Infrastructure, the appeal was both environmental and practical: "Favoring reuse over buying new furniture is a concrete way to reduce the carbon footprint."

Customers are more likely to act when sustainability is paired with quality, value and credible execution. Amazon shows what that can look like when shared targets and accountability are built into the relationship from the start.

Through Circular by Steelcase: Remade, our plant in Sarrebourg, France remanufactures select seating products for customers looking to extend the use of their chairs.

Where progress becomes practical

Customers need even more than sustainable products — they need partners who can help them plan, measure and execute sustainability goals in real projects. Which is why the capabilities at dealerships matter. Through our Dealer Sustainability Workgroup, we're helping dealers build the structure and confidence to embed sustainability in their strategies through tools, templates and best practices.

Jennifer Clark, Vice President of Operations and General Manager at Circadia, says the workgroup gave her clarity around emissions tracking, goal setting and governance.
"Learning how other dealers approach sustainability made the work feel less daunting," says Clark. "It changed my view of sustainability from a reporting requirement into a strategic opportunity."

That dealer capability matters because customers often need more than sustainable products — they need partners who can help them plan, measure and execute sustainability goals in real projects.

What momentum really means

What all of these examples point to is simple: net-zero progress becomes stronger when more organizations act on it.

- Suppliers strengthen how they measure and act.
- Product teams rethink the materials they use and how products endure.
- Dealers gain the tools to build their own strategies.
- Customers find expanded options to align purchasing with their goals.

That is what momentum makes possible — not speed alone, but shared capacity. The work moves through many hands, so the benefits can reach further: into stronger customer choices, more resilient partnerships and products that support people while reducing impact on the planet.

Explore ideas, stories and solutions that can help move your sustainability goals forward.

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