

Mulally Names an Environmental Executive for Ford

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Not long ago, it would have been folly for an auto company chief executive to admit he believed in global warming, and just as unlikely for a carmaker to attach the word "sustainability" to a job title.

But Ford Motor's chief executive, Alan R. Mulally, did both on Monday.

Speaking with journalists in a conference call, Mr. Mulally said, "I clearly believe the vast majority of data indicates that the temperature has increased. And I believe the correlation and analysis that it's mainly because of greenhouse gases."

His comments came as Mr. Mulally announced a promotion for a Ford vice president, Susan M. Cischke, to a new job as senior vice president for sustainability, environment and safety engineering.

Ms. Cischke, who now reports to Mr. Mulally instead of to Ford's Washington office, will be in charge of creating a long-range strategy on sustainability matters.

The first executive at a Detroit auto company to have sustainability in her job title, she previously was vice president of environmental and safety engineering.

She becomes the highest-ranking woman at Ford and the latest executive to take on an expanded role since Mr. Mulally became chief executive in September.

The auto industry is facing the likelihood that it will be forced to make cars and trucks that achieve better gasoline mileage. On April 2 the Supreme Court ruled that the Environmental Protection Agency had the authority to regulate carbon dioxide and other greenhouse gases from automobiles. The primary way that can be done, carmakers and environmentalists say, is to increase automobile fuel economy.

As a result, Detroit carmakers, which have a long history of fighting regulations, are saying they want an active role in the movement to reduce the damage vehicles do to the environment.

They may have little choice: lawmakers have introduced measures in Congress to raise federal fuel economy standards to as high as 40 miles a gallon, from the current standard of 27.5 miles a gallon for cars and 24 miles a gallon for light trucks.

Likewise, the Bush administration is proposing a series of steps on the environment that include raising fuel economy by about one mile a gallon each year over the next few years.

"We can have it if we all work together," Mr. Mulally said Monday.

Ford has previously tried to position itself as an environmentally conscious company, especially when Mr. Mulally's predecessor, William Clay Ford Jr., was in charge, only to pull back on promises of building more efficient vehicles.

For example, it abandoned a pledge, made in 2000, to improve the fuel economy of its sport utility vehicles by 25 percent by 2005. Last year Ford gave up on plans to sell 250,000 hybrid-electric vehicles each year by the end of the decade, saying instead that it would place greater emphasis on developing vehicles that can run on fuels other than gasoline, like E85, a mix of ethanol and gasoline.

Mr. Mulally acknowledged that Ford had made those vows before it had the technology to achieve them.

"On one hand, you have to give Ford credit for being a leader and for being out front originally," he said. "On the other side, we're just seeing another recommitment of Ford that this is really important and we're going to make it a high priority of the company."

Representatives of environmental groups said that they were glad to see Mr. Mulally's latest steps but had not forgotten Ford's record.

"It's always good when we see a company making steps toward becoming more environmentally sustainable," said Mike Hudema, director of the Freedom From Oil Campaign, an alliance of three environmental groups.

"But we do always have to put that in context with Ford's history," he said, "which unfortunately on the environmental front is not a very good one."

Dan Becker, director of the global warming program at the Sierra Club, said Ford was good at making promises to help the environment but "when it comes to doing them they seem to forget or fall down on the job."

He questioned whether Ms. Cischke was the right executive to focus on sustainability, saying that she had testified before Congress opposing steps the Sierra Club had proposed. "It's as if the Yankees promoted manager Joe Torre to reach out to the Red Sox," he said.

Nick Bunkley contributed reporting.

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