

Chipmaker adopts patch of forest for reforestation

ST Microelectronics' five-year project at Bukit Timah Nature Reserve is part of its global strategy to go green

By **DOMINIC NATHAN**

CHIPMAKER ST Microelectronics is sinking its roots deeper into Singapore, this time into a patch of forest at the Bukit Timah Nature Reserve.

It will be possibly the first manufacturer in Singapore to adopt a patch of forest for reforestation.

Some 1,000 trees will be planted on a 1-ha plot in the reserve, which it will adopt for five years for a start, said ST Microelectronics spokesman Joanne Tan.

The move is designed not just to give the company a green image, but also one that is tied very closely to its goal to cut the company's carbon-dioxide emissions to zero by 2010.

Such emissions, which come from burning oil in power stations to generate electricity, are partly to blame for global warming.

While debate on the phenomenon continues to generate heat, the organisation has gone ahead to set specific targets to cut energy use at all its 18 manufacturing sites worldwide.

Its president and chief

executive, Mr Pasquale Pistorio, told The Straits Times in a recent interview that its Singapore facilities are pioneering some of these efforts.

Between 1991 and last year, its facility in Ang Mo Kio Industrial Park cut by 12 per cent every year the amount of electricity used to make one of its standard wafer products, while boosting production by about 20 per cent a year.

"We have invested about US\$1.9 million (S\$3.3 million) in energy conservation efforts alone since 1991. But this has saved us US\$95 million in electricity," he said.

The company plans to keep cutting energy use, but it is also looking at how else it can achieve its goal of being environmentally neutral by 2010. So, why reforestation to achieve its aim?

Trees absorb carbon dioxide, and the company figures that if it plants enough of them to fill an area of about 350 sq km — half the size of Singapore — this will remove another 11 million tonnes of carbon dioxide from the atmosphere.

This is unrelated to its

business, but the company, which is committed to achieving its zero-emissions target, says it plans to invest some US\$50 million worldwide in reforestation.

Its 1-ha site in Singapore is a modest symbolic contribution.

Banking group Hongkong and Shanghai Banking Corporation (Singapore) has sponsored two reforestation sites in the past, but ST Microelectronics is the first company under the Adopt-a-Park Scheme to adopt and sponsor a reforestation plot for five years.

The company will also supply funds and volunteers for reforestation-related activities with schools and the community.

The National Parks Board has identified 148 ha of degraded forests in the nature reserves.

Over the past eight years, reforestation has been carried out in 10 major areas here, covering a total of 20 ha.

Said Mr Pistorio: "Reforestation is not a long-term solution, but an important stop-gap measure we are taking while alternative sources of energy become viable."

Reforestation is vital for conserving Singapore's natural heritage.

He's all for being green

IF ST Microelectronics boss Pasquale Pistorio had his way, he would raise the price of petrol by 10 cents a litre a year for 10 years.

He would funnel the money from this "carbon tax" into incentives to encourage energy conservation and the use of alternative sources of energy.

For example, incentives can be given to make energy-efficient vehicles cheaper and to encourage the use of solar or wind energy.

While his ideas of a petrol tax may not sit well with motorists and the Consumers Association of Singapore, which is lobbying oil companies to cut pump prices, his other ideas are already being promoted here, although perhaps not aggressively.

While praising Singapore's efforts to become clean and green, he believes more can be done, especially to cut the energy wasted in providing air-conditioning.

"It's strange, every time I come to Singapore, I risk catching a cold. The air-conditioning is just too cold here."

The head of the world's seventh largest semiconductor company makes no apologies for being an environmentalist.

In fact, his company's bottom line is proof that being green is as good for

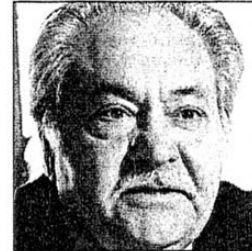
shareholders as it is for the environment.

Its fourth-quarter gross profits last year exceeded US\$1 billion (S\$1.75 billion) for the first time.

He takes the green message home as well. No gas-guzzling stretch limousine for this boss. His company car is an energy-efficient hybrid, a Toyota Prius, which uses both petrol and electricity.

The 1.5-litre car emits only half the carbon dioxide of a regular car of the same size and it performs almost as well.

"My Prius was the first to be registered in Geneva", he proclaims proudly. "And ST Microelectronics is buying one at every location around the world where it operates. Singapore will have one too."



No gas-guzzling limo for Mr Pistorio, he has an energy-efficient car.

Reforestation:

◆ **WHAT IS INVOLVED:**

A site is identified and, through research, suitable native plants are found for it. The site is weeded before the saplings are planted and watered.

They are watched closely in the first two months. After that, they are checked every month to ensure the site is weed-free. From the third to the fifth year, site visits are done annually.

◆ **WHY:** The Bukit Timah and Central Catchment nature reserves represent the last and only extensive piece of Singapore's mixed primeval and mature secondary forests. This last outpost of natural heritage covers about 2,158 ha, excluding reservoirs.

◆ **BENEFITS:** Reforestation complements NParks' long-term plan to conserve native flora and fauna. It is vital to rehabilitate areas once used for agriculture which have been invaded by weeds. It also helps to maintain the diversity of plants and animals (and their gene pools) in the nature reserve, promotes their vigour, disease resistance and adaptability, and minimises soil erosion.

