PRESS RELEASES

Mar 18, 2003

Ecolab Adopts Rule 10b5-1 Stock Repurchase Plan

ST. PAUL, Minn., Mar 18, 2003 (BUSINESS WIRE) -- Ecolab Inc. announced that it has adopted a plan to repurchase its shares under Rule 10b5-1 under the Securities Exchange Act of 1934.

Rule 10b5-1 allows a company to purchase its shares at times when it ordinarily would not be in the market because of self-imposed trading blackout periods, such as the time immediately preceding its quarterly earnings releases. The shares to be repurchased under this 10b5-1 plan would be part of the share repurchase program authorized by the Ecolab Board of Directors in December, 2000. Approximately 4.1 million shares remain to be purchased under that program, with the purchases used to offset the dilutive effect of shares issued for stock incentive plans and for general corporate purposes.

The 10b5-1 share purchases are expected to commence as of Ecolab's next earnings blackout period and continue for subsequent quarterly blackout periods, as it deems appropriate.

Depending on market conditions, Ecolab also expects to continue to conduct purchases in the open market and in privately negotiated transactions from time to time during its normal trading windows.

With sales of $3.4 billion, Ecolab is a leading global developer and marketer of premium cleaning, sanitizing, pest elimination, maintenance and repair services for the hospitality, foodservice, institutional and industrial markets. Ecolab shares are traded on the New York Stock Exchange and the Pacific Exchange under the symbol ECL. Ecolab news releases and other investor information are available on the Internet at http://www.ecolab.com.

This news release contains various "Forward-Looking Statements" within the meaning of the Private Securities Litigation Reform Act of 1995. These include statements concerning expected commencement of repurchases under the 10b5-1 plan and the continuance of repurchase transactions during both future blackout periods and normal trading windows. These statements, which represent Ecolab's expectations or beliefs concerning various future events, are based on current expectations that involve a number of risks and uncertainties that could cause actual results to differ materially from those of such Forward-Looking Statements. These include, but are not limited to, unexpected requirements for cash, including for acquisitions, changes in the Company's business prospects, the number of stock options exercised by employees, the market price of the Company's stock, unexpected changes in financial market conditions, and the potential need to periodically refrain from market purchases due to securities law requirements as well as other uncertainties or risks reported from time to time in the Company's reports to the Securities and Exchange Commission.

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Back to Press Releases