

Water conservation and the new economy

By Sandra Tavares

Small and medium size businesses in Canada should and can make a huge difference when it comes to water conservation, especially in their local communities and with their employees.

With the new voluntary ISO 26000 guidance document on social responsibility launched in November 2010, businesses now have guidelines and should be aware of them. The document defines one of the benefits of social responsibility as "achieving savings associated with increased productivity and resource efficiency, lower energy and water consumption, decreased waste, and the recovery of valuable by-products. The time to drive home sustainable water management practices for small/medium size businesses is now."

Sustainability consultant, Paul van der Werf, President of 2cg Inc. and My Green Workplace.ca, says that small to large companies are working to improve

environmental performance. "It's been interesting to see that during our recent economic times commitment to the stewardship of resources hasn't faded away," said van der Werf. "Companies are mindful of researching and finding opportunities to improve their environmental performance with water, waste, and electricity."

He sees many small businesses participating at the local level with incentive programs associated with utilities. Local utilities are raising awareness and small business owners are reaping savings while learning how to manage their water and energy better.

Water's value in Canada is becoming broadly recognized as having the important resource priority that it should. The Walter and Duncan Gordon Foundation, Canadian Water Network, and RBC Blue Water Project recently teamed up for the *Blue Economy Initiative*. This fall, it will release results of a study

about the economic benefits of protecting Canada's fresh water, and the economic risks of neglecting the health of watersheds.

"Canada's lakes and rivers hold 9% of the entire planet's freshwater supply," says Bernadette Conant, Executive Director of the Canadian Water Network. "It is critical that Canada's relative 'abundance' not make Canadians complacent about water supply, nor divert attention from the critical importance of water quality. Water is not distributed evenly across Canada, nor are its people, industry and environmental needs. Much of Canada's water is frozen or flows north, away from populated areas. Just one percent of its supply is renewed each year by precipitation. The quality and security of that supply underpin public and environmental health, as well as the economy."

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medium size businesses have is that they can begin to make long-term changes quickly, that can have positive economic effects in the short term.

1. Begin with a water audit - The best place to begin is with a water audit, as every business will use water in different ways. This can be performed by a professional consultant or possibly the local utility. An audit will assess water consumption, where and when it is used, if leaks are present, offer repair solu-

tions, and will provide conservation guidance. With water rates on the rise, a water audit is a great place to start.

2. Reducing water consumption - Every flush, shower and hand wash can reduce water consumption in your business, so employees and contractors can play a conservation role. Consider installing dual flush toilets, which can save nearly 11.4 litres per flush. For all taps, install a low-flow faucet aerator, which will save 2.6 litres of water per

minute compared to standard faucets.

3. Rethink outdoors - Using native plants and grasses and harvesting rainwater to irrigate them will cut watering use.

Case Study

Recently, Levi Strauss & Co. introduced its Water<Less™ jeans. This product innovation was the result of the company looking at its social responsibility. Research showed that, during its life cycle, a single pair of Levi 501 jeans used more than 1,914 litres of water, before it got to the consumer.

The Levi Strauss & Co. example is a life cycle approach to sustainability that is also addressed as an environmental consideration in the ISO 26000 guidance document.

By making changes during the manufacturing/finishing process, the company was able to come up with Water<Less™ jeans and reduce its water consumption by an average of 28%. The new finishing process combined numerous wash-cycles and replaced the use of wet stones with dry stones, still giving the product its expected look. To manufacture 1.5 million pairs of Water<Less Jeans, for just one season's line, added up to a saving of approximately 16 million litres of water.

The Levi Strauss & Co. example is a life cycle approach to sustainability that is also addressed as an environmental consideration in the ISO 26000 guidance document. Sustainability is evolving quickly, as a growing number of organizations are demanding sustainability accounting from their supply chains. As such it is a key component to staying competitive.

Sandra Tavares is with Tavares Group Consulting Inc., which annually presents a one-day overview of environmental legislation. www.tavaresgroupconsulting.com An on-line way to integrate ISO 26000 into a management system will be available in February 2012 at www.sustainabilitylearningcentre.com



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Chief Engineer
PS 44 \$155,552 (US\$ equivalent)
Department of Works and Engineering
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Closing date: October 31, 2011.