

The Environment at Work

CONSERVING ENERGY IS GOOD for both the environment and your bottom line, a factor many businesses overlook. At **Edgewood College**, our heating and electricity bill rose by seventy-three percent—from \$464,277 in 2002 to \$803,499 in 2006. Something had to be done. In May 2005, the college created a “Green Campus” committee that, in partnership with key constituents, has pursued an eight-step process for improving environmental performance.

Step 1: Acknowledge previous successes. We began by publicly praising environmental accomplishments to date, sharing an activities retrospective with employees, customers and suppliers. Among these accomplishments: we installed 7 rain gardens that capture large volumes of water runoff, preserved 16 Indian mounds, and purchased environmentally friendly cleaning products and science lab chemicals. In addition, **J.H. Findorff & Son**, contractors for the remodeling of Mazzuchelli Hall, received the Association of General Contractors’ 2005 Environmental Excellence Award for green practices.

Step 2: Gather relevant data. We benchmarked current environmental performance for the most obvious items—electricity, heat, water, and paper use. The data formed the foundation for an initial environmental indicator report by which to measure our progress.

Step 3: Engage employees in incremental changes. The indicator report is a living document used to develop goals and implement ideas for continuous improvement. Fortunately, Edgewood is able to include our customers—students—in the change process. In 2007, the college sponsored its second annual Eco-Olympics, where student teams encouraged residence hallers to reduce water, electricity and heat use. Winning dorms achieved a 21 percent reduction in water, 44 percent reduction in electricity use, and 15 percent reduction in heat use. Consider creating similar competitions and rewards for energy use reduction accomplishments.

Step 4: Inspire employees by tackling a large project with a high likelihood of success. At the June 2005 brainstorming session, committee members were most excited about building a boardwalk adjacent to Lake Wingra to enable the college, community groups and neighbors to appreciate and better manage the wetland. A generous grant from the **Madison Community Foundation** turned the dream into reality, and the grand opening is October 4.

A second high-profile project was the construction of a new “green” residential hall. **Potter Lawson** architects, Findorff construction project managers, and Edgewood College personnel

developed a cost-effective plan to obtain LEED green-building certification. Opened in August, Dominican Hall has solar thermal water pre-heating, a closed-loop water source heat pump system for heating and cooling, plumbing that reduces water use by thirty percent, and extensive natural lighting. More than 90 percent—282 tons—of the construction waste was recycled.

Step 5: Enhance customer awareness. Last October, Edgewood was the first Wisconsin college or university accepted into the DNR’s **Green Tier** program, which recognizes businesses that go beyond current regulations to reduce environmental impact, an achievement not lost on our students.



The most common changes include recycling, reducing paper use, installing energy-efficient lighting and motion sensors, turning off computers at day’s end, and eliminating hazardous chemical use.

Step 6: Institutionalize changes. Green Tier designation obligates a company to develop an Environmental Management System plan and to conduct annual environmental audits. An EMS plan details a company’s environmental policy, planning, implementation, operation, and management review. Our environmental health and safety director manages the EMS, and works with faculty and administrators in conducting the annual audit and preparing the indicator report.

Step 7: Impact the broader community. Becoming part of Green Tier has enabled college staff to join discussions about best practices with like-minded companies. In addition, all MBA students apply the Natural Step environmental management framework to their current employers. Students choose a “low-hanging fruit” to change in partnership with an organizational change agent. The most common changes include recycling, reducing paper use, installing energy-efficient lighting and motion sensors, turning off computers at day’s end, and eliminating hazardous chemical use.

Step 8: Continued education. This fall, the college has instituted a reading program for all incoming freshmen. They’ll read **The Omnivore’s Dilemma** by **Michael Pollan**, which examines the environmental impacts of our food choices. We’ll integrate the book’s contents throughout the curriculum—and our food system operations.

Every organization has employees capable of similar environmental accomplishments. What win-win environmental policies and activities could improve your company’s bottom line and enhance employee morale?

Denis Collins is a professor at Edgewood College School of Business. Does your organization have innovative policies or activities beneficial to employees or the community that we should know about? If so, write to dcollins@edgewood.edu.