



Businesses thinking green

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In downtown San Antonio, CityNap, has become a green data center by buying all of its power from CPS Energy's renewable wind-generating sources.

At Toyota Motor Corp.'s San Antonio plant, workers actively focus on reducing energy, water, emissions and landfill waste.

Locally and nationwide, businesses are adopting green practices because they can save money as well as natural resources, said Joel Makower, founder and executive editor of GreenBiz.com, an online news site based in Oakland, Calif.

"It has gone from a movement to a market," Makower said. "More companies are thinking holistically about their impact, but more significantly they are thinking about how they can derive value from green thinking in their business."

San Antonio Water System, known as SAWS, has worked with companies such as the Hilton Hotel, Coca-Cola, Frito Lay and dozens of others to reduce water consumption and to adopt new water-saving technology.

"Our community has reduced per capita water use by 40 percent since the early '80s," said Calvin Finch, water resources director at SAWS.

Residential use has dropped, but so has commercial, governmental and schools' water usage, he said.

"Every time we change out a low-flow toilet, we save 11,000 gallons per year, and in an industrial setting the amount is even higher," he said.

More companies now are landscaping with reclaimed water in addition to golf courses, parks and Trinity University. Some companies, including the South

Texas Blood and Tissue Center, even have installed rainwater collection systems onsite.

At the Toyota plant, 100 percent of the water used in its operations and for landscaping is from the recycled water system, said Ryan Rose, plant spokesman

Toyota's Tundra plant in San Antonio is working to become a zero landfill plant, meaning everything is recycled. The plant also is using water-based primer and paint on its vehicles to reduce emissions.

Toyota's on-site supplier system reduces transportation emissions and packaging waste, Rose said.

"It's environmentally friendly and cost-effective," Rose said.

CPS Energy has four San Antonio corporate clients that buy 100 percent of their energy from wind-generated electricity through its "Windtricity" program. The companies are CityNap, Aveda Institute, Laszlo Rain and Stone Oak Orthodontics. Three other companies are buying a portion of their power from the wind program: Clothesline Cleaners, Lucifer Lighting and K. Charles & Co. San Antonio has 2,000 residential customers who are in the program.

"These customers are willing to increase their energy costs to secure their power from renewable," said Justin Chamberlain, marketing analyst at CPS Energy.

The Windtricity program, which began five years ago, costs \$3 per 100-kilowatt hours of electricity, which is slightly more than the normal commercial base rate.

Austin-based Whole Foods also runs all of its stores on renewable wind-generating power, including its 10-year-old store in the Quarry Market, said Suzy Holleron, the store's marketing manager.

The San Antonio Whole Foods store also recycles all the waste from its produce and prepared foods department. It's sent to a recycling plant in Buda and turned into compost, which the store sells.

H-E-B started a grocery bag recycling program at its stores two years ago and has saved more than 136 million plastic bags, said Dya Campos, spokeswoman.

In December, the grocery store chain began test-marketing a canvas reusable grocery bag program in 50 stores, including seven in San Antonio. Customers buy the canvas bags and bring them back to the store to bag their groceries. It plans to roll out that program to all of its stores, she said.

In addition, H-E-B works with local schools to recycle bags and pays them for the bags they return, Campos said.

"We want students to actively think about the environment and ways they can conserve natural resources," she said.

Several factors have made businesses and consumers take notice of the green movement and join it, said Nicholas Eisenberger, managing principal of GreenOrder, a sustainability strategy and marketing firm based in New York, whose clients include General Electric, General Motors, DuPont and Office Depot.

High gas prices, Hurricane Katrina, people seeing evidence of global warming everywhere they live and conflict in the Middle East all have contributed to companies looking at climate changes in a new way and questioning what they can do to address it, Eisenberger said.

"The level of interest we are seeing is really unprecedented," he said.

Eighteen months ago, Wal-Mart went green. It issued a three-page sustainability pledge with goals to power its stores with 100 percent renewable energy, to eliminate 30 percent of the energy it used, to reduce its solid waste by 25 percent, to increase recycling efforts and to sell products that sustain natural resources and the environment.

If there's waste or pollution somewhere along the line, someone ends up paying for it, said Kory Lundberg, spokesman for Wal-Mart in Bentonville, Ark.

Wal-Mart's focus on green business practices is paying off. By working with one private brand of toys to reduce packaging size, Wal-Mart saved \$2.4 million in

freight costs last year, and it saved more than 3,800 trees and more than 1,000 barrels of oil in transportation costs, he said.

"That was just one brand of private-label toys," he said, noting that Wal-Mart wants to reduce overall packaging by 5 percent by 2013.

At one of its experimental stores in McKinney near Dallas, Wal-Mart put motion-sensitive lights in its freezer cases. They are triggered when a customer walks by. The stores are also turning off lights during daylight and relying on skylights or "daylight harvesting systems," Lundberg said.

What's going on at Wal-Mart is extraordinary and it's having a ripple effect, said Makower with GreenBiz.com.

Last week, Home Depot announced it would introduce an "eco options" label to help consumers identify environmental-friendly products in its stores. Home Depot already has identified more than 2,500 products for the label, including all-natural insect repellents, cellulose insulation, front-load washing machines and organic plant food.

As part of the Eco Options launch, Home Depot will give away 1 million compact fluorescent light bulbs today in honor of Earth Day. Home Depot sold 50 million CFL bulbs last year. The Home Depot at 527 Fair Ave. will open at 7 a.m. and will give away 400 of those light bulbs on a first-come, first-served basis.

"Overall as a country, consumers are looking for things that are more environmentally friendly like the CFL light bulbs that are energy-efficient and will save them money in the long run," said Chris Martin, assistant store manager.

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