

Less waste is smart business

By Bill Blazar

The Minnesota Chamber of Commerce has an excellent record of delivering legislative victories that translate into significant savings on the bottom lines of large and small businesses. Less visible, but equally important, are our everyday efforts to offer private-sector solutions to public problems.

Our two sustainability programs – Waste Wise and Energy Smart – are premier examples. Grow Minnesota!, our economic development program aimed at keeping businesses growing here, is another. More on Grow Minnesota! in the future. Today, let's focus on Waste Wise and Energy Smart.

Our initiatives trace their steps to 1994 when the Minnesota Legislature was considering a tax on packaging. Business leaders, at the initiative of the Minnesota Chamber, decided to take the growing waste issue into their own hands.

Waste Wise was created to protect the state's natural resources and build business profits. Our expert staff identifies ways to lower overhead costs through reducing, recycling and reusing waste. It's as easy as inviting us into your worksite, and we take it from there.

Successes led to the creation of Energy Smart in 2008. Our staff finds opportunities to reduce energy costs and guides companies through the steps to receive financial incentives. Almost any worksite has plenty of low-hanging fruit such as replacing light bulbs – projects that can be accomplished with minimal effort and at minimal cost. We'll also help you tackle more extensive and expensive projects like replacing heating, air conditioning and ventilation systems.

Both programs continue to make their mark. Since 1994, Waste Wise staff has helped businesses throughout the state divert more than 30 million pounds of material from the waste stream. Since 2008, Energy Smart staff has facilitated projects resulting in a cumulative cost savings of nearly \$2.8 million for companies.

Our staff's expertise enables us to assist in a variety of projects:

- Multitenant buildings are some of the most challenging places to establish recycling programs and alter waste collection. Today, approximately 30 businesses at Overton Park and Heights Plaza, St. Paul, are recycling commonly produced items such as cardboard, paper, plastic, glass and metal. The group is now recycling an estimated 28,900 pounds of material per year – reducing trash output by more than 50 percent.
- Sappi Cloquet, one of the largest producers of specialized dissolving wood pulp in North America, began recycling all of its combustible-derived fuel waste as well as its pallets, electronics, and a few other miscellaneous items. Sappi is now able to efficiently recycle hundreds of tons of materials each year.

- Summit Brewing Co., St. Paul, changed the lighting in the kettle area of its brewhouse from incandescent floodlights to high efficient LEDs. The company anticipates an annual cost savings of \$3,527 and annual energy savings of 44,511 kilowatt hours.

Our sustainability staff provides a fresh set of eyes to explore ways to reduce your waste and energy costs. No matter how big or small your business, we have the expertise to evaluate your needs. Contact Jill Curran at jcurran@mnchamber.com or 651.292.4653 for your on-site evaluation.

The Minnesota Chamber is dedicated to providing Minnesota businesses with the tools and resources they need to be competitive and thrive. Our sustainability programs operate by a simple credo: Less waste is smart business for a better environment. It's a great opportunity for your company to become involved.

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