



## Companies think, earn green

By Carol Coultas, *Business Writer*  
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AUBURN - If you go green, you'll save green.

That's been the experience of the two speakers - both self-professed cheapskates - who addressed Thursday's Chamber breakfast.

Jim Wellehan, a longtime environmental activist and president of Lamey Wellehan shoe stores, and Andy Meyer, vice president of sustainability at Safe Handling, told the crowd gathered at Martindale Country Club how reducing their carbon footprint has promoted environmentalism and profits.

"They do go together," said Wellehan, whose company recycles 95 percent of its solid waste, and has done so since 1994. "It has saved us big time by doing that."

The company has further reduced energy use by 26 percent - and netted about the same percentage in energy savings, he said.

At Safe Handling, the savings have been even more dramatic for the industrial transporter. Management there solicited green ideas from employees (who got \$100 per good idea) and fueled several energy-saving measures.

One employee noticed that water hoses were left running all day because they were inconvenient to continually turn on and off. Purchasing and installing \$90 pistol grips on the hoses saves Safe Handling \$3,000 a year and about 700,000 gallons of water, said Meyer.

Another employee questioned why they weighed each empty truck before filling it with chemicals for transport, since the weight of the empty trucks remained constant. By weighing the trucks only when they're full, Safe Handling saved 10,000 gallons of fuel and \$33,000 a year in diesel costs.

"We also relieved staff of half the workload," said Meyer.

Safe Handling has already made huge strides in reducing its carbon footprint. In the past few years, it switched to rail from long-haul trucks to transport dry chemicals, rather than liquid, to its Rodman Road plant. There, the chemicals are mixed with water to form the necessary custom product, which is then delivered to Maine

customers via its short-haul trucks that operate on biodiesel fuel.

The company saves energy by reducing the weight of what's transported (dry chemicals versus the liquid version) and how (rail versus truck.) Overall, the company has reduced its carbon footprint by 90 percent and cut costs by 50 percent.

"And we make a profit, and we hire more people," said Meyer.

Both men cited agencies that can help businesses make the change to greener workplaces. Efficiency Maine performs free energy audits and then helps pay for improvements such as energy-efficient lighting and programmable thermostats.

EnerNOC, a private company that provides energy-demand solutions, pays big electricity users to be on call to reduce usage during peak loads so that more expensive energy doesn't have to be purchased for the grid. Safe Handling qualifies for the program because it pays more than \$50,000 in electricity costs annually. Just by agreeing to be on call, it reduces its electricity costs by 5 percent. This year, it turned off electricity at the plant for less than three hours.

Meyer said two Maine paper companies have saved between \$4 million and \$5 million a year by agreeing to be on call with EnerNOC.

But savings can be on a much smaller scale. Meyer noted with some amusement that the discussion was taking place in a heated room, where windows were opened because 250 people were stifling. Overhead were at least 50 incandescent bulbs in recessed lighting fixtures.

Just by being aware and taking small measures will save companies big money.

"This is a time for us to throw in the towel and give up, or capitalize on this opportunity," he said.

Wellehan urged attendees to back the state's Cool Communities initiatives, which encourages municipalities to conserve energy. Auburn has already given it the thumbs-up, and Lewiston councilors are expected to look at it next week.

"Our street lights are 50 years old," said Wellehan, by way of example. "LED lights use 6 percent of the energy" (the older bulbs use).

And that's a waste of money.

"The thing is, I'm cheap ... and I suspect a lot of you are, too," he said.

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