

# Sustainability boosts the bottom line

BY CHRISTINE VANDERWILL



**A**s new federal leadership is paving the way for a low-carbon economy and climate action plans roll out in provinces across Canada, one might ask: what is the role of small and medium-sized business?

Ninety-nine percent of Canada's businesses are small and medium-sized enterprises (SME). In B.C.'s Lower Mainland alone, SMEs generate an estimated 30 to 40 per cent of greenhouse gas emissions (GHGs) through the energy used to heat and power their buildings, the fuel consumed by their vehicles and equipment, and the waste generated while making products and delivering crucial services. In making the transition to a prosperous, low-carbon economy, SMEs will be critical players.

Fortunately, there is already a strong and growing group of SME leaders in construction innovating on this front, and along the way, demonstrating that cutting carbon emissions also means cutting costs and becoming more competitive.

- Glacier Creek Contracting has reduced their waste sent to landfill by 35 per cent and their emissions from landfilled waste by 226 tonnes CO<sub>2</sub>e. They were also able to reduce their waste hauling fees by more than \$64,500.
- Aggressive Tube Bending has been working to reduce its greenhouse gas emissions by improving insulation in its new facilities, introducing anti-idling practices for vehicles and heavy equipment, retrofitting lighting for maximum efficiency, reducing emissions from welding gases, increasing recycling efforts and eliminating unnecessary paper use. Overall, from 2011-2013, Aggressive Tube Bending reduced their emissions by 22 per cent.

- Continental Roofing developed a custom mobile app that crews can use to send reports and photos to the office rather than making an extra trip to deliver paperwork. As a result, the company has reduced fuel costs by 15 per cent across its fleet of 30 trucks and cut carbon emissions by 35 per cent per employee.
- RDH reduced greenhouse gas emissions per employee by 34 per cent., equivalent to removing 38 cars from the road each year, through simple low-cost strategies such as reducing

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paper use, installing more efficient lighting, and reimbursing staff for transit passes.

- Concert Properties has set a target of reducing greenhouse gas emissions 20 per cent by 2020. By tracking greenhouse gas emissions Concert is also drawing the link between operational expenses and carbon/energy performance. For instance, gathering building energy data from across their portfolio, Concert now monitors energy use per square metre, and can identify particular properties on which to focus their efficiency efforts.

Not only do these companies represent innovation in the construction sector, but they are all also Climate Smart certified, and among hundreds of SMEs across Canada that are finding smarter, less carbon-intensive ways of doing business.

To date, more than 80 construction sector businesses have certified as Climate Smart, including companies such as Perkins + Will, BTY Group, Gateway Property Management, Penfolds Roofing & Solar, BelPacific Excavation & Shoring, Century Group, BC Comfort Air Conditioning, Unitech Construction, DL Safety Consulting, Umbrella Property Services and more.

"Construction and real estate development companies working on the design and construction of our future infrastructure are essential partners in building a low-carbon economy. They collectively represent as much opportunity for reducing emissions as any other sector; they will either help us build towards a low-carbon economy, or alternately lock us into a carbon emissions-dependent society," says Climate Smart president Elizabeth Sheehan.

In 2013, Climate Smart released a Construction and Real Estate sector Industry Brief packed with data and evidence to help companies benchmark their progress among an industry range and uncover significant opportunities for improving operational efficiencies.

Findings from the brief include:

- Responding to and anticipating supply chain requirements is the number one motivation for companies within the construction and real estate sector to measure emissions with Climate Smart. This demonstrates a response to emerging market drivers to meet environmental standards, and stay competitive on bids and proposals.
- The largest share of emissions from the construction sector are attributable to fuel used in vehicles and equipment. In building construction, 51 per cent of emissions are attributed to transportation & equipment, while for those in the heavy construction and specialty trades, 92 per cent of emissions are from these same sources.
- The majority of companies are reducing their main sources of emissions (transportation and waste) in their offices, throughout their building portfolios and at construction sites, through both innovative low-cost behaviour change initiatives and capital upgrades.
- Landfilled waste is the second largest emission source in building construction. Through participating in the Climate Smart program, 56 per cent of construction firms and 70 per cent of real estate property managers are now diverting waste from landfills by increasing recycling rates and educating staff on waste separation. **CB**

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