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Preventing, cleaning up messes is good business for future

Some environmental companies are finding profits in waste

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CanWest News Service

Saturday, January 13, 2007

REGINA -- Historically, big businesses have made big messes. Greenhouse gas emissions, oil spills and unsafe water have become unsavoury but all-too-commonplace topics in the news, and industry is beginning to sit up and take notice.

Within the past couple of decades, businesses have been cropping up with the goal of cleaning up others' messes -- or simply keeping a mess from happening in the first place. Some of them are turning a pretty good profit in the process. And that isn't likely to change, according to those in the field.

Vern Corbett, head of several Saskatchewan Institute and Applied Science and Technology programs including environmental engineering technology, said former students have gone on to find work in the environmental field -- something he expected to see continue.

"In terms of prospects for that type of industry, they can only expand," he said.

"We don't see any softening of the market for people with environmental employment," agreed Grant Trump, president of the Environmental Careers Organization Canada. "There's a greater public awareness of environmental issues . . . and I don't think these environmental issues are going to subside."

According to Environmental Careers Organization Canada, between 2000 and 2004, the environmental workforce outpaced the Canadian workforce as a whole by 60 per cent.

Meanwhile, it found that one in four Canadian organizations are now recruiting environmental practitioners from entry level to senior positions. Job variety has expanded, with new positions and places to work continually emerging. ECO Canada's 2004 Environmental Labour Market report found that, at that time, there were nearly 12,000 job vacancies in the environmental sector in Canada.

Peter Klaptchuk's Regina-based business Ozonator Industries -- a branch of Sanitec Canada -- is one of those businesses, on the cusp of success with its biohazardous waste treatment technology.

The Ozonator Industries president and chief executive officer said Sanitec got off the ground in 1998 as a way to deal with biohazards, something Klaptchuk knows a lot about with a 30-year history in dealing with biohazardous waste.

The made-in-Regina Ozonator technology uses ozone gas to disinfect and dispose of biohazardous waste. The material decays when treated with ozone, leaving only oxygen as a byproduct, explained Klaptchuk.

This technology is ideal for treating biohazardous waste generated by the health-care industry, he said -- waste that is now frequently burned, creating greenhouse gases.

"For every ton of waste you burn, you generate a ton of [carbon dioxide] greenhouse gases," said Klaptchuk. "One of the driving forces behind making this new technology, this Ozonator, is that our technology can be taken and put right in the back door of a hospital."

Earlier this year, the company won the approval of the North Carolina Department of Environment and Natural Resources, a major breakthrough for the Ozonator.

Meanwhile, Sanitec has been nominated for an award in Germany for its made-in-Saskatchewan SaniGreen process, which sterilizes waste seed product, including seed that has been chemically treated. This process protects companies' intellectual property and the environment by providing an environmentally sound method of disposing of the used seed.

Raum Energy president and CEO Darryl Jessie is hoping to provide yet another alternative. His nine-month-old Saskatoon-based company is working on a wind generation project that would install light-weight and cost-effective wind turbines.

Unlike many other companies in North America, Raum Energy intends to also supply towers and converters with the windmill-like units, making the company a one-stop shop for wind power customers.

The one-kilowatt turbines are intended to supply 25 per cent of household energy, or simply charge batteries for those who wish to remain off-grid.

He said he and his company's one-kilowatt turbine would offset roughly about one tonne of carbon dioxide a year in a typical home, with one turbine being roughly equivalent to two mature trees.

"It seems to be the right place at the right time and in the right venue," Jessie said. "We're taking a risk of course. We think our products will be good, but we'll see how the public views them, and I think it will be very good."

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