

Energy audits pay dividends in pilot

E3 initiative helping manufacturers become more productive, efficient

Business First of Columbus
Monday, December 7, 2009

It didn't take much of a push to get John Burns and his company involved in a fledgling program aimed at helping manufacturers reduce energy costs, boost productivity and promote green business practices.

The E3: Economy Energy and Environment program was designed as a model for collaboration among manufacturers, utilities, municipal governments and federal agencies.

The U.S. EPA initiative, being led in Central Ohio by American Electric Power Company Inc., the city of Columbus and the Solid Waste Authority of Central Ohio, recently completed two pilot tests in Columbus and San Antonio.

"AEP is our best customer and approached us about getting involved," said Burns, president of C.O.W. Industries Inc. in Columbus, a sheet metal fabricator formerly known as Central Ohio Welding. "We jumped at the chance, even though we did not know the program would be so rewarding."

'Lifetime resource' Burns' company was among six to undergo so-called "lean and green" E3 audits this year. Conducted by teams from the University of Dayton and TechSolve Inc., a process management consultant in Cincinnati, the audits identified ways to cut waste and disposal costs, improve energy efficiency, reduce carbon emissions and make better use of water and other resources.

E3 sponsors said the audits identified ways for the six companies to save more than \$4 million annually. That includes \$38,000 at C.O.W. Industries, a 40-employee operation.

"It's got everyone thinking about conservation, recycling, turning off lights and sealing off rooms," Burns said. "It will be a lifetime resource for us."

The other participants were G&J Pepsi-Cola Bottlers Inc.; automotive parts supplier Hirschvogel Inc.; steel maker ArcelorMittal; TimberTech, a manufacturer of composite decks and fences; and Crane Plastics Manufacturing Ltd.

E3 sponsors are trying to raise \$360,000 locally to extend the pilot to 35 additional companies in Central Ohio. Also, the city of Columbus hopes to use federal stimulus money to create a \$1 million revolving loan fund to help companies carry out recommendations arising from E3 audits.

City officials are waiting for a grant agreement on the loan fund plan to be approved by the U.S. Energy Department, said Erin Miller, the city's environmental steward. The fund could be in place by January, she said.

"(E3) has truly demonstrated that environmental protection can be the same as economic prosperity," Miller said. "We can do this hand in hand."

Columbus efforts Miller said E3 fits with Mayor Michael Coleman's Get Green Columbus initiative that connects economic prosperity with sustainable environmental practices.

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Using a grant from the federal EPA, the city provided \$18,000 in matching funds for the E3 pilot project. AEP also contributed that amount, with the six companies paying \$3,000 each. The rest of the bill was covered by the EPA, U.S. Commerce, Energy and Labor departments and the Small Business Administration.

Mark Bueltmann, AEP's manager of sustainable supplier development, said the company was drawn into E3 because of its prior support of the federal Green Suppliers Network, a program that promotes lean manufacturing techniques coupled with sound environmental strategies.

Looking for a utility to recruit companies for an E3 pilot, federal officials turned to American Electric last October, Bueltmann said.

"This is the first full-scale pilot and what the program will look like (nationally)," he said. "It's been a phenomenal accomplishment in a single year to get this sort of return."

In addition to the \$4 million in annual savings for the six companies, the E3 audits identified ways to avoid 257,000 pounds of water pollutants, 23,161 tons of carbon dioxide emissions, 207 tons of sulfur dioxide pollution and 24,000 pounds of solid waste.

"It's a big return for a minimal cost," Bueltmann said.

Author/From the desk of Jeff Bell