

Edmonds Sustainability Heroes

Landau Associates



Employees of Landau Associates and their families participating in a local restoration project.

(On January 27, 2015, Mike Nelson and Jim Stevens, two members of the Mayor's Climate Protection Committee of Edmonds interviewed Jeremy Davis, an employee of Landau Associates, to learn the firm's success story with increasing its energy efficiency and reducing its greenhouse gas production. The company is an environmental engineering and remediation, geotechnical engineering, permitting, and compliance services firm located in Edmonds at 120 2nd Ave. S. The following article describes the employee and company motivations, efforts, and results achieved.)

Jeremy Davis, an Associate Engineer with Landau Associates, has no difficulties in sharing the many important things done at his firm to increase sustainability. Clearly, he himself has been an active participant in developing and justifying proposals for senior management. Being an engineering firm, Landau's employees agreed the first step in moving to more sustainable operations was gathering detailed operational data to calculate the carbon emissions the

company produced. In 2007, they started using a software tool produced by the Seattle Climate Partnership. It took into account the items they purchase (including furniture, paper, etc.), fleet vehicle use, building energy consumption, waste production, and even the effects of employee commuting. The resulting product was a very thorough and helpful analysis of what Landau produces in the course of operating as a business. They still use this calculator biennially.

From this carbon emission analysis, Landau developed a set of measures that initially focused on low-hanging fruit, that is, the things that offered the biggest returns. Computer management was an easy target. Jeremy said Landau has approximately 80 employees among its office locations, and leaving computers constantly energized proved to be a significant inefficiency. The company purchased a product called Kill A Watt, which can be used anywhere to collect real-time energy consumption and cost data for equipment. Providing employees with this data and projecting how the cost over a year of operation was useful in changing habits. Office lighting was scrubbed of anything still remaining that was incandescent in favor of fluorescent. Office paper was changed to high-recycled content, and they began a composting program. Fleet vehicles came under scrutiny to ensure the right choice was matched to the requirements of the job. As the need to replace vehicles has arisen, going to hybrids or acquiring new vehicles with improved gas mileage has been the norm.

Probably the biggest single piece of carbon production was found embedded in employee commuting habits. Jeremy admitted that making improvements here was also a tough challenge because of individual preferences and needs. To enable change, Landau offers employees a subsidy for public transit costs. The same subsidy is also provided to those who carpool or ride a bike. Quarterly, the company sponsors an 'anything-goes' commuter contest. Employees participating in this contest have walked, run, ridden bikes or motorcycles, carpooled, bussed, taken the train, and even kayaked as part or all of their commute to work.

As a firm practicing earth sciences and engineering, Landau has a large number of employees who are committed to making a tangible difference to our environment. The company actively encourages new ideas from employees to increase sustainability. There is a committee of 10 or so that meets quarterly to improve the results they have already achieved. Clearly, they understand sustainability is more like a journey than a destination. Jeremy quickly says that they are far from done with making changes and moving the company farther down the road of doing the right thing. The committee also produces tips for employees to help green up their activities at work and at home. In both Edmonds and Shoreline, they have participated in projects to plant trees and remove invasive vegetation.

Jeremy does profess that it likely is easier bringing these kinds of changes to the culture of a company if its workforce is composed of scientists and engineers who understand the issues.

He also acknowledges that not all their proposals have been approved, but many have, often because sustainability measures also provide returns in the long run. In recent years, Landau has pursued an exciting option to address carbon reductions not achievable in-house. Through a broker, the firm purchases carbon offset credits and renewable energy certificates. One pathway Jeremy related works with smaller landfills to capture and reduce methane emissions. This reduction in emissions would not otherwise be economical or required by regulation. Dollars used to purchase these carbon offset credits provide direct reductions of greenhouse gasses. Renewable energy certificates invest, through a broker firm, in the production of energy through alternative sources, such as solar and wind-generated energy and landfill-gas-to-energy projects. Between making significant reductions and purchasing credits/certificates, Landau is proud to operate carbon-neutral.

Although not every Edmonds business has the technical expertise of Landau Associates in-house, Jeremy recommends any firm can take an important first step to sustainability by calculating its own carbon production. Simplified and comprehensive carbon calculators are available on-line for both organizations and individuals to understand their biggest contributions to carbon production. This is a key lesson from Jeremy: it is easier to find the correct path when one first is well oriented on where (s)he currently stands.

Additional Resources

Website for more information on a firm offering carbon offset credits and renewable energy certificates: <http://oneenergyrenewables.com/>

Free simplified carbon calculator: <http://www.nature.org/greenliving/carboncalculator/>

Manufacturer of Kill A Watt and other energy monitoring/saving devices:
<http://www.p3international.com/products/energy-savers.html>