

A changing tide

Meet Nova Scotian companies that realize sustainable practices are good for the bottom line

by TOM MASON

It might be one of the most ubiquitous of ocean resources, but it has never gotten a whole lot of respect in North America. Then again, *ascophyllum nodosum*—the same seaweed that litters beaches after a storm—hasn't suffered from the same overexploitation that has plagued the Atlantic groundfishery either. One Nova Scotian company is taking great pains to make sure it stays that way.

Over the past 25 years, Acadian Seaplants Ltd. has become one of the largest producers of marine-plant materials in North America. Its five processing plants spread over three Maritime provinces turn rockweed into value-added products such as fertilizers, agro-chemicals, animal-feed additives—even a salad ingredient for the Japanese market.

“We believe in doing what we’re doing in a sustainable manner,” says company president Jean Paul Deveau. “We’ve spent a lot of money studying the growth patterns of seaweed.” To make that possible, the company has a full-time scientist on staff who conducts long-term studies and publishes papers that are used by scientists and seaweed-harvesting countries around the world. “We’re very proud of the fact that we have the best-managed marine resource in Canada,” says Deveau.

Acadian Seaplants is one of a new breed of Nova Scotian companies—those that realize their bottom line depends on coming to



terms with the environment. More and more, the company also is changing the way it does business. In their 2002 book, *Cradle to Cradle: Remaking the Way We Make Things*, William McDonough and Michael Braungart lay out a blueprint for a new business paradigm; one in which nature and industry coexist. The philosophy is the opposite of the old “cradle-to-grave” paradigm, where products are used and then discarded when they wear out.

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In a cradle-to-cradle world, products may change form, but they will continue to be used forever in an endless loop. McDonough and Braungart argue that industry is at odds with the environment because design always has followed the easiest road, with little concern for anything beyond the usable lifetime of a product. In the future, say the authors, products will be used, recycled, and used again. In a cradle-to-cradle world, a factory doesn't work like a machine gobbling up energy and spewing toxic-waste products into the environment, but more like a tree that fits into its surroundings organically.

Acadian Seaplants could have provided a chapter in McDonough and Braungart's book. Since its startup in 1981, it has managed its resource so well the seaweed biomass has remained completely stable, and

the company's 300 independent fishermen take less than the annual growth rate. Acadian Seaplants keeps track of the resource with regular on-the-water inspections and lays down strict guidelines, including conservative exploitation rates, which all company harvester-fishermen must follow. “Think of a beautiful lawn,” says Deveau. “If you mow it regularly, it will continue to grow and look beautiful, but if you cut it too close, you will kill it. It's the same with harvesting seaweed.”

Acadian Seaplants' dedication to environmentally friendly practices is evident in other areas of operation as well. An innovative program turns surplus plastic barrels used in processing into municipal recycling containers. At one of the company's facilities in Cornwallis, a waste stream has been converted into a soil amendment that is sold to local farmers; with annual sales of more than \$20 million, the bottom line is quite secure.

Minas Basin Pulp & Power Co. Ltd. has been around for more than 78 years, despite the fact that the paper industry has been challenged over the last few. In recent years, the Annapolis Valley company has been doing something even more impressive than just existing: It has been garnering praise from environmentalists who long have been opponents of logging and power-generating operations. President Scott Travers goes even further, boasting that his company is one of the most environmentally friendly in the province.

For one thing, Minas Basin stopped using trees to make its heavy cardboard paper products more than a decade ago. Today it only uses 100% recycled waste, a process that diverts about 60,000 tons of landfill waste every year. “We use only post-consumer waste,” says Travers. “That's an important distinction. It means we're using only paper diverted from landfills.”

Travers is keenly interested in environmental issues. A nature lover, he is a big supporter of wind power and points out that Minas Basin Pulp & Power and its holding company, Scotia Investments, are pursuing wind energy with three test towers in the ground already in Blomidon, Morden, and the New Ross area. This year the company will throw the switch on a new technology that will trap factory-waste heat before it

escapes into the atmosphere and will send it back into the system to reheat the paper-making process. Travers also is proud of the fact that Minas Basin's power has received Ecologo certification from the federal government, one of a handful of power-generating facilities in the country to do so. “We're getting green energy out of our 1937-era hydro turbines,” he says. “That's pretty impressive.”

Travers probably would be focused on the environment no matter what kind of product his company made, but he admits that greening a company also can have a positive effect on its bottom line. “A lot of what we do is out of necessity,” he says. “With the cost of energy now, we have to find ways to conserve and get the most out of the energy we use. Paper is a tough business.”

DO NO HARM

Like paper-making, the carpet industry has been at the forefront of environmental criticism in recent years, mainly because of its role in causing sick-building syndrome, a condition that affects the health of thousands of office workers every year. With more than one billion square yards of carpeting manufactured annually around the world, the carpet-making process itself has come under a lot of scrutiny recently.

Truro-based Crossley Carpet Mills Ltd. has taken the criticism to heart, spending almost a year doing the paperwork to receive ISO 14001 certification. Brian Anderson is the company's ISO 14001 representative; he says that most of Crossley's 300-plus employees were behind the effort. “We're all people who like to paddle a canoe or go camping,” he says. “As a species, we've done enough harm to the environment.”

By most standards, Crossley Carpet Mills is an old company. Founded in England in 1805 as John Crossley and Sons, it relocated in Truro after merging with American company Karastan in 1964. Throughout four decades in Canada, it has remained competitive by staying on the cutting edge of innovation and by offering customers a high level of customization.

Anderson's team spent months documenting the plant's environmental practices, monitoring factory air quality and

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— Brian Anderson, Crossley Carpet Mills Ltd.

emissions and soil health. In the process, Crossley removed the factory’s latex steam heating system and replaced it with propane. New recycling programs also were put into place that reduced factory waste yarn by 25% and internal landfill waste by nearly 50%.

The environmental assessment also helped Crossley meet the conditions of the LEED rating system. Developed in the United States for the commercial-building market, LEED uses a point system to rate building efficiency in areas such as water

efficiency, energy use, environmentally sound construction practices, and indoor environmental quality. Recently, the rating system has been getting a lot of attention in Canada as well, a fact that Crossley has been using in its marketing literature. Because of the company’s manufacturing methods and materials, all carpeting products meet LEED standards; they also contain recycled materials, another plus for LEED certification.

Office Interiors is one company paying close attention to environmentally friendly

workplace products. “We look for two primary elements when we’re selecting our products,” says president Jim Mills. “First, we need to find the best solutions that also have a strong environmental component. Also, each product we sell needs to be cost-effective for our customers.”

To meet those qualifications, the company partners with suppliers who share its vision—companies such as Ricoh Canada, whose printers and digital copiers have a unique energy-reducing technology, and Haworth, an office-furniture manufacturer and world leader in the use of environmentally sustainable products. Office Interiors also actively promotes the use of innovations such as moveable walls, which drastically reduce the amount of waste drywall heading to landfills every year.

For Mills, this attention to the environment translates into plain old good business sense. “It does have a bottom-line impact,” he admits. “Our employees feel good about these products. If they feel good about the place where they work and the products they sell, that can have a tremendous affect on your bottom line.” ■



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