WestLinn Tidings

LO company is closing the carbon construction gap

By CLIFF NEWELL
Staff Reporter

The "method" works well in acting. EcoLogistics thinks it will work just as well in achieving sustainability in the Northwest.

The new Lake Oswego-based company has developed a sustainability system called "The EcoMethod," which leaves no stone unturned when it comes to finding ways for contractors, developers and governments to reduce carbon emissions.

"This is a response to looking at the horizon and where we saw the market heading," said Chris Humphries of Birtcher Development and Investments, the parent company of EcoLogistics. "It goes beyond LEED buildings. It's a more efficient construction process all the way around. Currently, construction is a really inefficient process.

"We want to create a new green standard for development. This is a new company and a new system. We want to create something all developers and contractors can use. We're now talking to public agencies."

That is a hugely ambitious target for a company that began only two months ago. But Humphries said that Birtcher decided to take this step in response to the Oregon Carbon Challenge issued by Gov. Ted Kulongoski.

"It's a big wake-up call," Humphries said. "We can't just put up a few more windmills or recycle more to get anywhere near where we need to be.

"What we have is a call to action because of emerging carbon mandates, high energy prices, infrastructure strain and the funding gap. It screams out that we need a new system."

It was just last spring that a close examination of two Birtcher buildings in Portland convinced Humphries and Jim Edwards, the two founders of EcoLogistics, that a new system was necessary for building construction — 1919Lane and the Birtcher Center at Townsend Way.

These were two very "green" buildings by current standards.

In fact, the Birtcher Center received a LEED Gold rating. However, Humphries said that intense examination of the construction process showed that much more could have been done to "close the carbon gap."

"The Birtcher Center required 15,000 tons of concrete that required 788 trips by truck from a source 15 miles away," he said. "Forty-eight tons of CO_2 were created in that one mistake. It amounted to 21,000 miles.

"That put a flag up to us. If so much carbon could be caused by just two buildings, how many places was this happening across Portland and the Northwest? There were questions that begged for answers."

In just a few months, EcoLogistics was started and the EcoMethod was on the board. Basically, the method is a "real cost analysis" of construction projects that pulls together everything in a five-phase approach. It throws out extraneous stuff and simplifies a very complicated process.

Why should developers pay attention? Because government mandates on carbon emissions in the construction process are definitely on the way.

"This system is for anyone willing to look at the impacts of what they're doing," Humphries said. "Whether it's energy waste, fuel waste or miles traveled. You need a system to do that."

Birtcher's Bryce Benge said, "Everyone has signed on to some initiative on carbon emissions and energy conservation. We fit right into all of them. We bring a tool that will fit all of them."

Humphries, Benge and Edwards are convinced that the EcoLogistics' technique works.

Now they are talking to the business people who put up the buildings.

And they say there is no time to start like the present.

"We need to do something now, not talk about what we'll do in two years," Humphries said. "I think this will get moving when people see results. When they see that this will put them in more control of their own destiny, I think they'll buy into it."

To find out more about EcoLogistics and the EcoMethod, go to the new Web site www.EcoLogisticsLLC.com.