

Green Tier Working Session – January 22, 2007
Summary of Focus Group

Companies/Organizations Represented: Cook Composites and Polymer Co., Veridian Homes, Roundy's, American Transmission Company, Kimberly-Clark Corporation, Edgewood College, Storm Tec/representing Charter for Scrap Recyclers
Facilitator: Sharon Chamberlain, President, Chamberlain Research Consultants

Expectations

What are some important values for your business to achieve?

What other benefits were you hoping to achieve? (Probe for regulatory relief, environmental, dollars saved, public relations for company, etc.)

- The more we work together [Green Tier participant and DNR], the more the single point of contact (SPOC) can understand what we're trying to accomplish and understand there's always some give and take. ... having a focal person that we can pick up the phone and call—who knows who we are and we know who he is—and with whom we can just continue that dialogue instead of having a different player...makes a huge difference.
- We want to be involved with some cutting-edge stuff that we can do as a company and maybe get a few brownie points from the DNR and the community and whoever else there might be. We have a responsibility to be a leader.
- As a company that encounters a lot of permitting from different jurisdictions with multiple persons involved, we're looking at the one-stop shop. It's one person who understands who we are. We have a proven track record. Can we go in and get all these permits at one time, because we meet every two months (for our charter) with the DNR, city of Madison and others? In the mean time, if anything comes up, e-mail, phone call, et cetera—it's like we're working together in the same company trying to achieve the same thing. So it's really an enhanced relationship, as well as the trust.

Are you achieving or working toward meeting those expectations? What yes? What not?

- We have a system with the DNR in which we submit weekly photographs of each one of our sites to show them, almost as if it's in real time. Pictures can be filed away so a history develops throughout the course of the project. Instead of sending the inspectors out traveling the city, it's almost virtual reality from their desks.
- We have inspectors on all of our work to ensure that everything is being done in accordance with permits and to make sure that our commitments are being made. The company has also set up Web pages so the DNR and the Public Service Commission have the opportunity to access material right away and voice any concerns. The experience has helped ensure that we're doing things better than even a year or so ago.
- After a year and a half putting together an EMS, the benefit of that work now is that the people who did the work were developing the EMS and basically agreeing on what could be done to support it. The added benefit is that additional staff added during EMS formation had a training tool because the EMS was in place. They knew exactly what was expected of them. Now the EMS doesn't seem burdensome.

Impediments

What impediments are keeping you from achieving all you want?

- We joined Tier 1 with the hopes of making some improvements but it's taken a year of constant communication with our SPOC to even talk about one little change. The feedback we've been getting for the past year has been that's outside the DNR's regulatory authority, or we need to be in Tier 2 to realize those benefits. ... In the past couple of years, we've had 10-12 major projects go through permitting, plus about 100 or so small projects. It's those 100-200 small projects that we can get off their plate and make it easier to focus on the big stuff.
- We actually had a *higher* frequency of inspections.

Incentives

Are the incentives for participation good? Should there be others?

How is the program working toward community involvement? Regulatory relief?

Use of logo and marketing materials? More trusting relationships?

- While developing a major distribution center building we found all kinds of unanticipated issues and lots of local issues, specifically the impact of the distribution center on property values. Green Tier provided a foot print; we got direction we didn't anticipate. This was important because we want to be a good community member.
- Green Tier has helped us create a liaison between our company and the DNR. It actually gives us a vehicle to communicate on a much easier plane than we've ever done before.
- Green Tier has really helped our 'social license' to operate.
- Because of Green Tier we are not as intimidated with DNR as we used to be. In the there were a lot of times it was our attorneys talking to DNR's attorneys trying to figure out how we were going to get something accomplished. Quite frankly, that's just not an effective way for us to continue to do business is always having attorneys or advisors or consultants every time you turn around to talk to a state agency. I can remember early on in our conversations with the DNR—it's like, 'Who's the attorney that's going to represent us in this? We don't go to the DNR unless we have our attorney.' ... That's the last thing I think about today is pick up the phone and call our attorney to call the DNR.
- During one particularly slow and frustrating permit application, a permit engineer seemed overwhelmed and we were just horrified at what we were going to see. ... So we called and talked with DNR very openly, and they got some people involved who were more senior and understood how these types of permits could be written and structured for our type of operation.
- Normally we'd fear burning the bridge with the regulator. ... Through this process, it was no hurt feelings, no problem, but we just had to point out this was a path to a real problem. That was an example for us where I think there was a paradigm shift from the agency to say, 'How can we make this work, and who do we need to get involved?' ... I would not have attempted it in any other state. But we were striving for something more streamlined. ... I think it gave us that opportunity for dialogue, and the trust was there that we could talk openly.

Other business value you have experienced?

- It may help you grow your business. ... What can it do to bring on sales and enhance your image with the community? I think that's huge.

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- It's a point of differentiation from other businesses.

What needs to happen going forward to increase the value? Make it a really good program for you?

- We want to expand sustainability dialogue and environmental-excellence dialogue with our community and other businesses.
- In terms of market development and product design, we're really stretching both DNR and ourselves to see how we can partner with other Green Tier participants to see what we bring from a product standpoint that might be of interest to someone else who's in the Green Tier program.
- There are opportunities for working with a group to discuss how we can collectively improve our operations and what we can learn from others.

Improvements

Do you have suggestions for improvements to encourage other participants?

- The EMS process, and maybe what was viewed by our members as a roadmap toward ISO certification, was seen as very costly, very time consuming, a lot of paperwork, a lot of documentation, a lot of monitoring. That's hard for small businesses.
- One suggestion for DNR to help would be to participate and facilitate identifying 'aspect and impact evaluation' for companies that are either coming into Green Tier [or] looking at Green Tier.
- A 'How to' Workshop (develop an EMS).
- We integrated our EMS with other management systems so we could borrow a lot of the framework and understand standards and what things needed to be set and adapted to our specific site location. ... For some sectors with many small businesses, the critical step may be getting one location to go the distance on ISO 14001 and have other facilities use that plan as a starting point for their own EMS.
- I think it goes back to where are you at with your business and your system to be able to incorporate something like this into the process. If you don't have anything set up right now, the initial set-up or start-up may be a little bit intensive. But once you're there, it may just become involved in your whole process and the cost goes away. It's part of daily business.
- More outreach would be good. There are a lot of people whose businesses could benefit from being in Green Tier but maybe don't trust DNR or have had bad experiences. I think outreach to let folks know that we're [GT participants] here, we're changing, [and] this is a program that we want to encourage you into. These are things we can help you with. Finding ways to discuss that in business terms—not regulatory terms—is something that has to happen.
- DNR needs some marketing training. But we can help and we can have a role to play. We can help with our customers. We can help with some of our suppliers. We can play a role in helping to get people involved.
- This has been brought up from the environmental side that Green Tier might be targeting the wrong people. ... There's this constant debate of: Do you let the troubled companies into Green Tier or do you target the good actors? There needs to be a good answer to that. It's not necessarily one or the other, but there needs to be a strategy because I think this is a solution that's looking for a problem. ... It takes a lot of courage from DNR to go and engage

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a struggling company because it's not going to be politically correct to bring a company like that into a Green Tier-type of program. ... It could offer the biggest upside. Maybe that should be a target for Green Tier -- where you identify the struggling companies so you can provide the maximum benefit to the state but help them get systems into place so they can move to Green Tier status.

- I think people lose sight that this is a process—it goes on and on and on. When you start out, you're not going to be the best at anything. You're working to get better at everything. You do the aspect and impact analysis. You choose where you want to go at least initially, and you work to get there on a constant-improvement basis. You reach a goal and you say, 'What else can we take on and move forward with that?' and always try to get better.