

Partners in Project Green: training tomorrow's leaders

Written by Jennifer Taves

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Businesses around Toronto Pearson International Airport banded together in 2008 to develop Partners in Project Green — an initiative to transform Canada's largest employment area into an internationally recognized eco-business zone. *Energy Management* will be providing a quarterly update on activities in the Pearson Eco-Business Zone. This month is an update on stimulating renewable energy market uptake and developing "green" jobs.

Over the past couple of months Partners in Project Green has had continued success with its initial projects and initiatives, helping companies in the Pearson Eco-Business Zone streamline their operating costs and become more competitive in the emerging environmentally aware economy. Two area of focus of late have been on developing green jobs in the region and stimulating renewable energy market uptake.

One way Partners in Project Green is working to develop green jobs is through the Energy Management Co-op Program. This program is being designed to connect co-op students from Seneca College, Humber College and University of Waterloo with businesses within the Pearson Eco-Business Zone to implement energy efficiency opportunities.

The purpose of the Energy Management Co-op Program is to provide additional training and mentoring to students and employers during their work-term that will not only enable them to develop these types of projects, but spot and implement new opportunities within a company's operations that may not have been identified by the employer. The purpose is to take the co-op experience to a new level for both student and employer to a reciprocal learning exercise that improves the bottom-line of a company, while helping them green their operations.

Using students to help companies identify green business opportunities has become an important part of Partners in Project Green and an easy way for companies with limited resources to realize the benefits of these opportunities. Partners in Project Green recently partnered with Seneca College to match students from their Green Business Management Program to companies in the Pearson Eco-Business Zone to help them develop Corporate Sustainability Plans. There was an overwhelming response to the program with 58 companies interested, and only 19 students available. This demonstrated the forward thinking of the region's businesses and, most importantly, their interest in turning sustainability into a business opportunity.

Realizing that not all students are interested in post-secondary opportunities, the Cool Rexdale Program is being designed to engage young people from the Rexdale community in roofing apprenticeships. By using the City of Toronto's Eco-Roof Program (which provides a subsidy for green and cool roof technologies), funding for training from City of Toronto Employment and Social Services and the Sheetmetal Workers' and Roofers' Union Local 30, along with a partnership with Semple-Gooder (a local roofing contractor that has agreed to hire young people from Rexdale), the program aims to promote the installation of green and cool roofs in the Rexdale community, while providing career opportunities for young people. The objective of the Cool Rexdale Program is to promote economic investment, environmental improvements and job creation in one of Toronto's priority neighbourhoods.

Partners in Project Green has also been working on renewable energy options in the region.

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One opportunity being examined aims to develop a district heating and cooling network around Toronto Pearson, making use of the large amount of waste heat available from two local natural gas fired electricity generation plants. The District Energy feasibility study, undertaken with support from the Greater Toronto Airports Authority, the Region of Peel and the Federation of Canadian Municipalities' Green Municipal Fund, will examine the financial and environmental impacts of the proposed project.

Building on this local foundation of energy generation, Partners in Project Green is also working with its stakeholders to increase the adoption of rooftop solar projects in the region. Given the area's manufacturing and warehouse building typology and the availability of over 3,000 hectares of roof space, the opportunity for local companies to install rooftop solar and capitalize on the Ontario government's Green Energy Act is vast. Working with land owners and property management firms, Partners in Project Green is identifying and addressing the barriers to rooftop installations so that this opportunity can turn into new revenue generation and green energy for the region.

If you're a company in the Pearson Eco-Business Zone and are interested in learning more about Partners in Project Green, or you're a company that's simply interested in sharing your story, you can learn more at www.partnersinprojectgreen.com.

By Jennifer Taves is Project Coordinator with Partners in Project Green.