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The key to going green: It's up to you

-National consultant implores companies to take action.



Derek Smith, consultant, makes a point during a talk before Chamber of Commerce of St. Joseph County members Thursday in South Bend on "The Business of Going Green." Tribune Photo/GREG SWIERCZ

By **JIM MEENAN** *Tribune Staff Writer*

Derek Smith held up about seven pieces of paper he had found in his hotel room ---- from the breakfast menu to the traditional welcoming note from staff.

He asked where the paper came from.

Over the next hour, he spent much of his time during his presentation as the keynote speaker on "The Business of Going Green" letting people know exactly why it is important to know that answer.

Smith speaks and consults around the country on the need to accept the responsibility of environmental protection on a personal, corporate and social basis.

Brought in by the Chamber of Commerce of St. Joseph County and various sponsors, Smith gave the crowd of 109 people at the Marriott Hotel Ballroom in South Bend Thursday plenty to think about. What if Detroit had thought about future gas prices and pollution problems in the early 1990s like Japan, and come up with the first hybrid car? he asked, noting carbon emissions are the real problem.

It's time to think ahead, and quickly, he intoned.

Global warming is a fact, he said. "And you are the cause of it."

He presented proof in pictures and scientific research. Even acceptance by the national and international community.

"The problem is growing fast," he said, while clearly pointing to countries such as China, which he noted in example after example, require little restraint of its industries. But the solution begins with America, he said.

"Global warming will never be resolved without America," he said.

And businesses and business workers and leaders can make a difference.

"Leaders make calls," he said while urging people in his friendly British accent. "Followers take calls.

"We have to stop worrying about our children and start worrying about ourselves." To that end, he urged companies to take action and recommended seven steps.

They were:

- Form an environmental committee at the workplace utilizing all types of workers.
- Develop a philosophy.
- Determine your company's current carbon footprint.-Set goals for carbon reduction.
- Establish environmentally sound procurement programs.
- Incorporate your chain of trading partners.
- Market the finished product by telling your customers about it.

A former print and paper executive, he said, "Forests are our lifeblood." A total of 75 percent of the ingredients used in the treatment of cancer come from the Brazilian rain forest, he said. "Industries, if they don't take care of them, will run out of forests.

"You can't pull forests down and replace them with anything but forests," he said.

But everyone has to take responsibility, he said, using as an example the purchase of inexpensive patio furniture made in China.

"The price is low," he warned, "but the cost may be more than we can bear."

The U.S. has 20 years' worth of laws protecting forests, Smith said, but we don't ask foreign countries to be accountable to the same laws. The result is that China is the largest importer of paper to the U.S, he said. And 60 percent of it is bought by U.S. schools.

"We have the ability to say no mas," he said.

And he meant everyone.

"Ultimately," he said. "There's only one person we can rely on to make that change, and that is us."

Locals discuss greenThe breakfast also included a panel discussion that let the audience know many area companies already are taking action to become truly green certified.

"We were surprised during the process the ideas that came from our employees," said Chris Jones, IT manager with Mossberg and Co. Inc., the event's presenting sponsor.

Bill Barnard, vice president of The Troyer Group and a LEED (Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design) accredited professional, noted his company has been really going green for a long time.

"How many generations down the road does it impact?" he said, is a question they ask in the building process. The cost of a building might rise from one-half of a percent to 7 percent to be certified, "but the return on investment is somewhere from 30 to 40 percent," he said.

It can pay off in three to five years, he added, and sustainable buildings are selling for more money, too. In fact, that was one point Smith really hoped people did not miss Thursday.

Thanks to political and business leaders in Western Europe, Japan and the U.S. acknowledging that global warming is a problem, said Smith, "I think that the environmental business market is one of the biggest opportunities that I have seen in 40 years of business."

Small or large be the company, he added, "the opportunities exist to make money from doing what is right.

"That is a unique opportunity."

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