Environmental Case Study
North
*Discrimination Against Non-Green Companies?*

**Introduction**

Portland, Maine was proud to announce in 2004 that it had several exemplary Green Businesses in the city of 1,270,000 people. Officials were excited to announce that even on a cold and cloudy day, Washboard Laundry was able to produce adequate hot water using solar power. The small business heated 300 gallons of water at a time using solar panels to aid a gas heater. Green technologies such as this are being tested out in Portland and other areas throughout New England. Julie Churchill of the Maine Department of Environmental Protection summarized this trend succinctly saying, "Companies are becoming smarter."

By "smarter," Churchill means that the green technology is cutting down on the production of pollution and the use of non-renewable resources. She was happy to add the statement, "We are getting more applications from companies looking to participate in our environmental programs." Now, New England is finding that even large companies such as National Semiconductor Corporation and Nokia are going along with the green business movement. National Semiconductor Corporation has cut back oil and natural gas consumption by making its steam-based heating system more efficient. Other repairs and modifications saved them 173,162 gallons of fuel oil a year at almost $1 per gallon.

General Dynamics and the nearby Shipyard joined in by reducing the amounts of hazardous chemicals used in their manufacturing operations. Consumers and other companies favor purchasing goods and services from green companies. This obviously helps the company by bringing in more sales. Furthermore, it helps it shares selling in the stock market because of the positive publicity and increases revenue. Plus, incentives from cities and private agencies are making it preferable to use green technologies.

**Background**

Green technologies are part of the sustainability or Smart Growth movement taking place around the globe. These technologies permit cities to run more effectively by reducing energy needs and pollution production. It includes a wide array of technologies and strategies for carrying out business. For example, pollution can be reduced simply by using clean fuels or eliminating the need for people to commute in their personal cars. More and more studies are indicating that people prefer to live and work in cities that are free of pollution and have ample parks or trees.

The federal government, many states, and a variety of cities such as Portland, Maine are discouraging development that does not use green practices. They do this by awarding green companies and setting up ordinances that mandate sustainability. Plus, companies can get certification that they are a “green industry” and are given preference when bidding on government contracts. Environmental groups also provide green incentives by recognizing green companies and shaming non-green companies in the press and public education literature. Investments in green technology have also received a boost from the current instability in the oil producing nations. So, it then becomes patriotic to strive for green technology.
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The Issues

Not all people are in favor of green technology. There is still much debate about its overall impact on the environment. Green technologies that are known to be environmentally friendly when compared to an existing technology may have other hidden environmental costs. This means they can require the resources of other technologies that are not necessarily green. For example, solar panels require hazardous chemicals to build and can be a major pollutant if disposed improperly. Sustainable and green technologies are not always easy to define. Much of the sustainability movement was an attempt to reduce fossil fuel needs. So, in effect the burning of wood could be a green way of reducing petroleum burning. However, wood burning produces soot and does not reduce global warming. So, “green” has been refined into a rigid category of technologies and processes that decrease the need for fossil fuel and other natural resources while at the same time reducing pollution. Unfortunately, there are not too many technologies and processes that can meet these criteria.

The cost of going green can be a big problem for many companies. It is not always possible to get economic returns on green technologies. For example, Washboard Laundry spent over $6,000 for the solar water heater and may not pay it off for at least five years. Larger companies may have to sacrifice other things to go green before seeing any financial benefits. In many cases it may be permanently more expensive and difficult to carry out green operations. Some areas supplement any losses due to going green. However, the traditional companies find this unfair and not very practicable for sustainable growth.

References

Literature


Web Sites

1. Department of Energy
   http://www.sustainable.doe.gov/
2. GreenBiz.com
   http://www.greenbiz.com/
3. Urban Cities
   http://www.urbanicity.org/

Key Principles

1. “Green” companies
2. Renewable and non-renewable resources
3. Smart growth
4. Sustainable cities
5. Pollution reduction
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Ethical Considerations

1. Explain whether it is fair or unfair for governments to encourage people to use the products or services of green companies.
2. How could green companies be rewarded for their environmental efforts without penalizing the rights of other companies to do business?
3. Should companies be given incentives to use green technologies or do transactions with green commercial operations?
4. Should cities mandate green technologies in spite of the higher costs it may require companies and homeowners to use?

Civic Engagement & Service Opportunities

1. Volunteer for a local community group involved in encouraging green businesses and technology in your area.
2. Write or e-mail your local politicians about sustainable development initiatives in your area.
3. Form a student group having an environmental preservation mission.
4. Set up a public forum at your school discussing the green and non-green businesses in your area.

Learn more about community service as part of your educational enrichment by visiting the following websites: [http://www.learnandserve.org/](http://www.learnandserve.org/), [http://www.servicelearning.org/](http://www.servicelearning.org/).

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