

Earth angel

Hudson firm achieves an environmental first



Workers manufacture wall partition panels at AIS. The company is helping reduce carbon emissions. (T&G Staff Photos / DAN GOULD)

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HUDSON — For AIS Inc., it's not about political correctness. And company officials say it's not about the company's bottom line, either.

Its drive to reduce its carbon footprint through leaner and cleaner manufacturing as well as environmentally friendly contributions is "the responsible thing to do for the planet, for ourselves, and for generations yet to come," said Vice President Rob Lazarus.

AIS is the first manufacturer of office systems to receive certification from an internationally recognized company for measuring and reducing carbon emissions to zero.



Founded in 1990 as Affordable Interior Systems Inc., it has undergone an audit by CarbonNeutral Co. of the carbon dioxide emissions that are a byproduct of the manufacture of workstations.

The audit measured the greenhouse gases generated by all company activities including natural gas and electricity use; waste disposed; fuel used in company vehicles; miles traveled in the air and in rental cars; nights away from home in a motel; commuting type and distance; loss of refrigerant and movement of company-owned goods.

He said the company, which employs 350 and has annual sales of \$90 million, has a carbon footprint of 3,400 metric tons.

For each ton of carbon dioxide that AIS produces, it makes a payment to have an equal amount of carbon dioxide saved through an environmentally-friendly project somewhere around the globe.

Because the company wasn't ready to reach a carbon neutral point immediately through changes alone at the Bonazolli Avenue facility, CarbonNeutral matched up AIS with two projects in China and one in California looking for investor financing through carbon offsets. CarbonNeutral works with over 300 major businesses and hundreds of small and medium-sized companies in 32 countries to develop offset inclusive carbon reduction programs.

In this manner, Mr. Lazarus said, the company could offset its carbon dioxide emissions in Hudson by providing financing for energy projects.

The three investment opportunities selected by CarbonNeutral for AIS investment were a conservation-based forest management project in the Big River/Salmon Creek forests of northern California; the Damao wind power project in Inner Mongolia and the coal mine methane capture project in Tieling, China.

"Never has there been a more exciting time for AIS. The company has experienced tremendous growth, exceeding the industry average. We are gaining more business market share every day by staying true to our value philosophies and providing customers with a top-notch, quality project that is environmentally sensitive and meets company demands," he said.

Setting a goal of carbon neutrality isn't all that much of a stretch for AIS, Mr. Lazarus said, citing a top industry prize AIS received for "lean excellence." It was also recognized by Industry Week magazine as one of the top 25 manufacturing plants in North America.

Bruce Platzman, AIS president and CEO, said his company is "passionate about what we do best — and that is working diligently to meet customer needs in every way possible."

Throughout the plant, AIS has instilled a philosophy of reducing waste from every aspect of the manufacturing process — energy, greenhouse gas emissions, raw material waste and excess manpower.

Mr. Lazarus said because of the company's historic commitment to lean manufacturing, it is able to offer its office furniture systems at reduced cost and with significant environmentally favorable attributes.

"For everyone at AIS, this is not a sprint to some imaginary finish line. Reducing our own carbon footprint here on Bonazolli Avenue and Cherry Street is a marathon." he said.

"If carbon neutral certification just happens to bring in more customers interested in the company's workstations, then so much the better."



Shown is a furniture showroom at the Hudson company.
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