

Being Green Is A SAIF Bet

By Beth Casper

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SAIF Corporation has not stopped striving for a smaller and smaller environmental footprint since 2008, when it earned its EarthWISE certification.

The EarthWISE program is a free business environmental assistance program of Marion County. EarthWISE staff helps businesses recycle, save energy, reduce waste and much more.

The workers' compensation insurance company is even in the process of renovating a main building and environmental concerns play a big role in the design.

One of three SAIF Salem buildings will be torn down, and some of the land will be converted to bioswale, a landscape area where storm water is filtered before returning to a stream or aquifer.

The design for the renovated building includes a specific area to make it easier for janitors to store recyclables and employees to recycle items such as batteries and Styrofoam.

"Right now, we have recycling cans at everyone desk, but for the items that are hard



like batteries and Styrofoam we don't have a great setup," said Tracy Meyer, Green Team leader. "In the new building, we hope to have a specific center with signs that shows where to put items that do not go in commingled bins."

A new high-efficiency lighting system and heating-and-air-conditioning system will keep monthly utility costs down. It will be a major difference compared to the old building, which has lighting that emits so much heat that the air-conditioner has to run more often.

The new building also will be an energy generator. SAIF is a part of the Energy Trust of Oregon's Path to Net Zero program. It is likely that SAIF will add solar panels or make the building solar-ready to assist in creating power.

But their continued work is not just in

the green building realm. SAIF employees have continued to green their office practices.

For example, initial work to reduce paper usage saved 17,450 reams of paper—and \$21,987—a year.

But continued employee education has meant a work ethic focused on paper reduction. People are increasingly using only electronic documents and rarely printing one-sided sheets of paper.

"You start something out and sometimes it takes a while to get people to do it," Meyer said. "But if I go to a meeting now, people hide something printed on only one-side. They actually hide it!"

Instead of large paper packets for each member of the SAIF Board of Directors, staff sends them electronic copies. At the meeting, the directors use electronic devices to refer to the documents.

In addition, employees signing up annually for their health benefits no longer receive a lengthy printed document. It is all electronic.

SAIF's policy changes regarding commuting and use of company vehicles has also had significant impacts.

The company, which has employees traveling all over the state, has a large fleet of vehicles but it has managed to reduce gas usage and carbon emissions because of its policies. Out of 101 vehicles, 15 are hybrid or electric.

Employees are allowed to telecommute. In 2014, 834,624 miles were not driven because employees worked from home or adjusted their schedule to work four 10-hour days. That means that 36,288 gallons of gas was not purchased and 325 metric tons of carbon dioxide was not released.

"We drove 50,000 more miles in 2014 than 2013," said Meyer. "But we purchased 2,000



fewer gallons of gas. We are driving more miles, but purchasing fewer gallons of gas and emitting less pollution. Choosing the best miles-per-gallon car to fit the need for the job is the best policy."

Even in small ways, SAIF's sustainability is visible.

Employees were offered discounted reusable coffee and soda cups at the cafeteria several years ago. Now almost everyone has one of those or a different reusable one. Disposable cups have been reduced significantly.

A new composting program in the cafeteria will help reduce SAIF's garbage by about 14 percent. It will also reduce bathroom garbage because all of the paper towels will be able to be composted with the food.

SAIF's sustainability certainly influences employees' practices at home. But an annual Green Fair further exposes employees to green ideas. This past summer, SAIF's Green Fair event featured dozens of booths from composting to solar energy. About 400 employees attend the event.

"It is very popular and shows us that our employees care about these issues," Meyer said.

For more information about the EarthWISE program, go to www.mcEarthWISE.net or call 503-365-3188.



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