

Contractors Practice What They Preach

Sustainability Has to be a State of Mind

By Mark Skaer
For *The NEWS*

Engenuity president James C. Mooney, P.E., made a newfound discovery recently while going about his mechanical contracting business in Mechanicsburg, Pa.

"I was walking through our shop and noticed the drop cloths we stock are biodegradable," he said. "Our warehouse manager ordered biodegradable drop cloths. I didn't know such a thing existed."

The surprising disclosure did bring a smile.

"Since I was not involved in that purchase, I feel comfortable saying the message is getting transmitted throughout the company," he said.

The message? Providing sustainable HVACR services and equipment is not just for customers and clients. Following sustainable practices needs to be engrained in employees, one's HVACR contracting business, and in one's own backyard, too.

"Just like a good safety program, the green initiative has to come from the top," explained Mooney. "If the CEO doesn't have buy-in, it will die on the vine. We've gone so far as to purchase hybrid cars — three so far — "for our sales folks, incorporate green materials into our office renovation, and replaced all of our lighting."

Thinking over the overall progress to date, Mooney quickly added, "Our newest family car is a hybrid, so we have consistency at home, too."

It's all part of being a prestigious Mechanical Service Contractor Association (MSCA) GreenStar contractor. Sustainability is the mindset, as well as the goal.

WALKING THE WALK, TOO

To date, Engenuity, along with 16 other top-notch contractors, have earned the prestigious GreenStar plateau, designed to recognize a contractor for his/her "exceptional commitment to sustainability and environmental responsibility," explained Barbara Dolim, executive director of MSCA. To achieve this lofty status, a contractor must first earn the MSCA Star designation, which is based on stringent training, certification, and safety criteria. GreenStar is an additional honor, based on "dedication to promoting environmental sustainability throughout the entire organization, from employee training and

education to the products and services offered to customers."

In other words, these contractors do more than just talk the talk. "You have to walk the walk," said Woody Woodall of W.E. Bowers Inc., Beltsville, Md. "If you say this is important, make sure you keep it important. Continue to work at this. It is a constant effort to keep on top of changes and technology."

Added Kenneth Colburn, executive vice president of W.E. Bowers, "We want the community to know that we truly care for the environment and this belief strongly influences the way we do business. We are very proud to be the first company to attain the GreenStar designation and to have an organization like MSCA recognize our commitment to green and sustainability."

Becoming a GreenStar contractor was really a no-brainer in the eyes of Pete Smith.

"Not only do we see the benefit this has to the environment, but it is also quite clear that being a sustainable contractor is what we needed to become in order to be a viable option for clients who need our services," explained the vice president of service for Current Mechanical, Ft. Wayne, Ind.

"More and more, new construction and the retrofit market are making green buildings the standard. We want to be known as the leader in green building and sustainable design in North Eastern Indiana. GreenStar allows us the opportunity to promote ourselves as that."

MUST MEET QUALIFICATIONS

To gain GreenStar status, an applicant must:

- be an MSCA Star qualified contractor;
 - employ at least one Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design (LEED) Accredited Professional (AP);
 - be a member of the United States Green Building Council (USGBC), either with a local chapter or the national organization; and
 - participate as part of a project team with a LEED existing building (EB) or new construction (NC) registered project within the last three years.
- "I knew the MSCA was coming out with the GreenStar program and once the criteria was given to us, we began to implement the steps needed," explained Smith. "For Current Mechanical, this was not



Dispatcher Judi VanHam makes an empty plastic bottle deposit at the recycle center at Hurst Mechanical.



Midwest Mechanical with its GreenStar status grabbed the attention of city officials in Kansas City, Mo. Pictured (from left) is Kansas City officials Curt Futvoye and Robert Rives along with Mike Chick and Randy Cheatum of Midwest Mechanical.

a long or drawn-out process, as we had begun to put things into place before GreenStar had surfaced."

The more difficult rules to meet and exceed include:

- Demonstrating that one's company promotes environmental responsibility by offering specific sustainable services and recommending green procedures and equipment;
- Verifying that at least 25

percent of total employees, both in-house and field personnel, have participated in green training or education program; and

- Establishing internal commitment to green by attaining LEED certification, of any type, for one's own building, or by developing an internal green policy.

Regarding the green policy mandate, this means having, among other possibilities, an in-

house recycling program, utilizing programmable thermostats at the office, promoting alternative forms of transportation, and promoting the use of green cleaning products.

"The biggest challenge we faced was putting together an internal green policy that not only addressed how Current Mechanical operated, but also one that we could actually adopt and implement," said Smith. "This guiding



Enginuity president James Mooney (wearing red shirt in the front row) is proud of the way his employees have embraced sustainable practices.



Wayne Turchetta, vice president of HMC Service, provides some green awareness training to employees.

tenet has to come from the top of the organization down. Luckily here, our ownership believes in this and practices what it preaches. I think that is something that any organization that wants to go green has to consider. Adopting a plan is one thing. Following through on it is another."

All members believe that demonstrating environmental responsibility within their company only

proves their commitment to the sustainability movement.

"It may not be easy at first, but when you begin showing savings, employees like that, as do customers," said Russ Borst, vice president of service, Hurst Mechanical, Belmont, Mich. "I suggest getting a green team together and hit it from that approach."

Added Woodall, "The owners of our company just thought

committed

To date, the following 17 firms have earned MSCA GreenStar status:

- W.E. Bowers, Inc., Beltsville, Md.
- Hurst Mechanical, Belmont, Mich.
- T.H. Eifert Co., Inc., Lansing, Mich.
- The Fagan Company, Kansas City, Kan.
- Enginuity, Mechanicsburg, Pa.
- E.B. O'Reilly & Associates, Philadelphia, Pa.
- Current Mechanical, Ft. Wayne, Ind.
- Midwest Mechanical, Kansas City, Mo.
- Andy Egan Co., Grand Rapids, Mich.
- Hill York Service, Ft. Lauderdale, Fla.
- Indoor Environmental Services, Sacramento, Calif.
- HMC Service, Louisville, Ky.
- Boland, Gaithersburg, Md.
- Emcor Service/Mesa Energy, Irvine, Calif.
- The Enterprise Corp., Twinsburg, Ohio;
- Thomas G. Gallagher, Cambridge, Mass.
- Adrian Mechanical Service, Adrian, Mich.

it was the right thing to do, not only for us, but for our community and the planet."

EVOLUTIONARY ROAD

For Midwest Mechanical Service, Kansas City, Mo., the road to sustainability and becoming a GreenStar contractor was an evolutionary process.

"One of the things we are quickly coming to realize as a contractor/

service provider is that the key to sustainability is simply an attitude that begins between the ears," said Michael Chick, vice president and general manager. "About two years ago, our employee owners decided to truly embrace a set of core values that centers on doing what is right for our customer, as well as what is right for our environment long term. However, we felt like any successful venture

into the market place would have to begin in our own backyard."

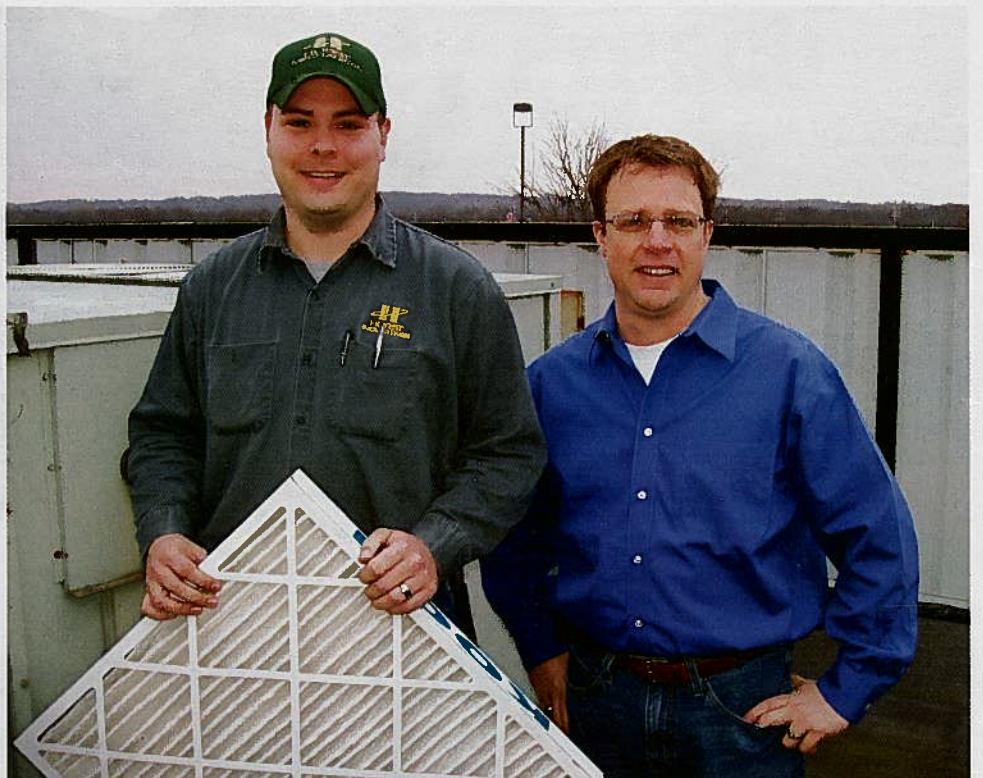
According to Chick, the change-over began when some of the company's key people became LEED-certified. What followed was a self-appraisal of the company's own carbon footprint at its home office in Kansas City. The next step, he said, was to develop a plan of action to systematically reduce the greenhouse gases generated as a company from its own operations.

"Fortunately, our office is just slightly over two years old and was built with a sustainable mindset, so we are already benefiting from great day lighting, day visioning, efficient mechanical systems, low-flow plumbing fixtures, and good indoor air quality," said Chick. "That said, we continue exploring alternatives to the way we do things on a daily basis, including changing our buying habits, the use and reuse of recycled materials where possible, innovations and efficiencies, reducing energy consumption, operations and maintenance, and, of course, recycling."

Because Midwest Mechanical learned by looking at itself first, the company is now able to see needed sustainable changes for clients and customers, explained Chick.



The E.B. O'Reilly Servicing Corp. team includes (from left) CFO J. Burr Daly, president Henry O'Reilly, and service-sales manager Add Anderson. The Philadelphia-based mechanical contracting firm is one of 17 contractors that have earned GreenStar status from MSCA.



In front of a rooftop unit, service technician Chad Arnold (left) converses with Russ Borst (right), vice president of service at Hurst Mechanical, an MSCA GreenStar contractor. To buy into sustainability, Borst recommended that contractors put together a "green team."

"As a result of what we learned by our own self appraisal, we now are able to take these to the market place," he said. "We find ourselves walking into the same buildings we have walked through for years, but now we do it with our eyes wide open. We do it with perspective and, most importantly, we do it with integrity."

PROVIDING SUSTAINABLE SERVICES

Thom Brazel said Hill York Service, one of the oldest and largest air conditioning companies in the state of Florida, has invested "significant resources in employee training and new technology to support our customers and the communities we serve." Brazel is Hill York's Sarasota-based general manager/West Coast operations and an MSCA national board member.

"As a recognized leader in the green movement within our industry, Hill York is dedicated to helping our customers achieve a high level of energy efficiency," he said.

The Fort Lauderdale company recently unveiled its state-of-the-art "Hygreen" solutions to help commercial property owners and managers reduce rising energy costs and improve HVAC system performance in existing and new buildings.

Mooney summed up involvement in sustainability by echoing the battle cry of the 1969 New York Mets.

"You gotta believe," is how Enginuity's president put it. "If you don't have buy-in to the green movement, you won't get anywhere. You've got to live it." ■

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stable sustainable suggestions

When asked to provide their top suggestions and ways to become a sustainable contractor, GreenStar contractors were not bashful to supply input. Here are a just few words of wisdom:

From Woody Woodall of W.E. Bowers, Beltsville, Md.:

- "Make yourself and some of your key people aware of the movement. Make sure this makes sense to you and that it fits your culture. Get buy-in at the top."

- If you believe that becoming more sustainable makes sense, then make the commitment. "Develop a company commitment statement and share it with the whole team. Make sure everyone in the building, on your job sites, and around the corner know you are committed to becoming a sustainable contractor."

- Join the United States Green Building Council (USGBC) and any other group that is working for sustainability.

- Educate everyone. "Offer lunch-and-learns and seminars to all of your team so everyone is on the same page."

- Educate your clients and others. "Become an active advocate."

- Look at your clients and start to develop offerings that fit them and the sustainable movement.

From Pete Smith, vice president of service, Current Mechanical, Ft. Wayne, Ind.:

- Make sure at least one staff member is LEED accredited.

- Practice what you preach.

- Develop internal policies and procedures that set the expectation for your company. "Set small attainable goals initially. This will help with buy-in from your employees."

- "Investigate registering your building for LEED certification and, if possible, act on those findings."

- Have someone on staff who understands current legislation and how that applies to green building and the opportunities it affords.

- "Periodically review your green policy and make changes as required. This is a 'dynamic' document that will continue to change and be updated. Don't let it sit on the shelf and get dusty."

From Dick Starr, LEED AP, The Enterprise Corp., Twinsburg, Ohio:

- Talk about your company's commitment to sustainability with every customer, employee, and vendor.

- "Understand that green must have a payback; financial first, cultural second. Business will demand it."

- Attend green meetings in your area. "It will develop your network of primary contacts."

- Educate your employees in the LEED credit process. "It will help them better understand 'What do we mean by green?'"

- Investigate state grants/credits that can subsidize projects with sustainability outcomes.

- Know the Energy Star rating system.

- Buy green coil cleaners when doing your mechanical maintenance. "It will demonstrate to both employees and customers your commitment is sincere."

From Wayne Turchetta, vice president, HMC Service, Louisville, Ky.:

- Part of the requirement for GreenStar is to be a member of the state USGBC chapter, but "I feel you need to take it one step further. I am the vice chairman and also the co-chair for the advocacy committee. Yesterday I met with the Secretary of Energy for the state of Kentucky. It was a great opportunity to help promote green and be recognized as the 'go to' contractor."

- Do lunch-and-learns about LEED EB and green awareness. "Most facility managers are looking for help in this area and to have a better understanding of LEED without doing a one day seminar."

- "I am working with the state Kentucky Teachers Association, Kentucky School Board Association, and Kentucky Superintendents Association to get the message out to the leaders so they can take the message to the teachers and the students."

- The USGBC Chapter Advocacy Committee is starting a program to work with the mayors throughout the state of Kentucky. "You want to be a resource to help educate them on something as simple as a programmable thermostat."

- MSCA's Green PM program "is a great tool to help educate the owners and facility managers."

From Add B. Anderson of E.B. O'Reilly & Associates, Philadelphia, Pa.:

- "Look at your fleet of cars and trucks. Can you go hybrid on company cars or trucks? There are tax credits available along with a significant decrease in your gas consumption."

- Look to form a partnership with a plumbing manufacturer so you can make recommendations for your customers and for your employees.

- Think about your employees and salespeople utilizing public transportation or car pooling.

- When looking at new business, take into account sustainable sites. "This means sites that provide for non-auto access, preserve open space, manage storm water, and reduce light pollution."

- Encourage water conservation. Reduce use of potable water for irrigation and for building water use and sewage conveyance.

- Reduce building energy use, use less-harmful chemicals for refrigerants, generate renewable energy on-site, provide for ongoing energy savings, and purchase green power for project use.

- Increase outside air ventilation, use only non-toxic finishes, carpets etc. Provide for individual comfort control. Provide daylight and views to the outdoors.

- Utilize your LEED professional. ■