

## **Atlantic Canada has potential to tap into green-technology economy**

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Atlantic Canada has the potential to be an economic powerhouse in the rapidly growing field of environmental technology, say business leaders.

"What I am excited about is we have a lot of existing capability here in the province already," said Eric Cook, executive director of the Research and Productivity Council (RPC) in Fredericton.

"It is not like we are starting from zero."

Cook said he was at a conference in Halifax recently to discuss the economic potential of environmental technology. He said the sector could be on a scale like the auto industry in Ontario and the aerospace industry in Quebec.

"I truly believe that environmental technology could be what Atlantic Canada is known for," he said. "It could be an economic driver.

"The good news I like about this is we are already off to the races. People are talking about it."

The federal government has a \$500-million sustainable technology development fund and this region needs to take advantage of that, said Cook.

RPC is working on a project to make mining more environmentally friendly, which could have global implications.

"What we are seeing now is those (mining) companies ... are looking for greener solutions for mineral extraction," said Cook. "Just in the last year we have started to see this happen."

RPC has been working for about two years to find a greener replacement for cyanide, which is a toxic chemical used to extract minerals from ore.

Cook said that in addition to being greener, the technique also had to make sense economically.

"It is definitely competitive," he said. "It is going to be exciting for us. We are hiring people ... to help us with all the expansion going on in that area. That is exactly what we are talking about in creating economic development."

Cook said Fredericton already has successful companies working in the field, such as Jacques Whitford, ADI, and Neill and Gunter.

He said one of the reasons that Fredericton has a cluster of companies working in the green or environmental technology field is the engineering school at the University of New Brunswick.

"We have the highest per capita concentration of engineers in the country here," he said.

RPC has 95 employees, and in 2006 served 945 clients in 33 different countries.

Cook also said consumer attitudes about green technology and products are changing, but not quickly enough.

"If we are given a choice between a green-produced product and a non-green-produced product, at this point in time the majority of people will select the one with the cheaper price, which tends to be the less green one," he said.

But that will change over time, said Cook.

"We actually will be willing to pay a premium for greener products," he said. "But we are in a transition state right at the moment."

Jim Knight, director of climate change at Jacques Whitford environmental consultants in Fredericton, said he has seen a big change in business attitude about the environment recently.

He calls it the beginning of the carbon-free or carbon-neutral economy.

"I would say there has been a huge change over the last six to eight months, with things like the release of the fourth series of reports from the international panel on climate change and with more media reporting," said Knight.

The movie An Inconvenient Truth by Al Gore and the rebuttal movie called The Great Global Warming Swindle have a lot of people talking, he said.

"Things like that have grabbed the attention of the public and CEOs of very large companies," said Knight. "It is pretty clear now that going into the future we are going to be faced with a carbon-constrained economy.

"If companies want to expand, they are going to have to look at ways to manage carbon emission and climate change."

He said Jacques Whitford has just hired a person to be director of climate change in the American operations.

"We've been working in the area of climate change for a number of years, but probably have put more focus on it in the past 18 months," said Knight.

One of the projects the company did recently was an environmental review for the Town of St. Stephen, including an energy audit of its buildings, its fleet, waste-water treatment, lighting system and waste disposal.

"We took a look at what their emissions were and how they could set a target to reduce those emissions," said Knight.

Business is also interested.

"The federal government has put out a framework for reducing greenhouse-gas and air-pollution emissions," said Knight.

"We are going to help them (businesses) do baseline emissions over the past years, and help them to find an opportunity to reduce those emissions directly," he said.

Jacques Whitford is also walking the walk on climate change.

The company recently announced it's starting a carbon offset program.

"We are going to buy credits to offset those as an interim measure," said Knight. "But over the next few months, we are going to do further analysis ... to reduce those greenhouse-gas emissions directly."

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