



# Business Edge

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## Eco-industrial parks surging in popularity

### Projects can deliver advantages environmentally, economically

By David Hatton - Business Edge

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Canadian companies are leading a global trend toward environmentally friendly industrial parks, according to experts.

"I think Canadians are realizing how important this is and a lot of people right now around the world are watching the major projects we have going on," says Tracy Casavant, president of Vancouver-based Eco-Industrial Solutions and a director with the North American Eco-Industrial Council.

"I mean, if you are going to design an industrial park then why not do it on an ecologically friendly level? There can be huge advantages from both an environmental and an economic standpoint."

Casavant says the idea of eco-industrial parks has been around for years, but recently surged in popularity as demand for green buildings has increased. Eco-Industrial Solutions is involved in a number of projects across the country that use what it calls eco-industrial networking, or EIN for short.



Ray Cote, professor emeritus at Halifax's Dalhousie University

The company website defines EIN as creating relationships where groups will collaborate on efficient ways to use resources like material, energy, land, infrastructure and people.

"It's looking at ways tenants can all get together and look at helping each other and synergies with a common goal of protecting the environment. That can take a number of different forms, but still share the same goal."

Casavant says two types of projects have emerged - new construction and retrofit. "There are advantages and disadvantages to both. It's easier to do a brand new project from an operations and planning standpoint. Another major consideration is cost; it's always cheaper to do it right the first time around," she says.

"But if you do a retrofit project, the businesses are already in place. You save on marketing costs because you don't have to go out and try to attract new tenants."

One of the biggest eco-industrial construction projects is about 300 km west of Edmonton, in the town of Hinton. When the \$14-million Innovista project is scheduled to finish next year, it will boast on-site water treatment facilities, waste-management programs and preferential parking for energy efficient cars.

The Federation of Canadian Municipalities awarded Hinton a \$3.3-million grant and \$2.2-million low-interest loan in 2005 to help with the project's costs.

"Hinton was one of the first out of the gate on that scale and will be interesting to watch," Casavant says. "The concept of industrial parks has been around for a while. We're just realizing what can be done with an eco-industrial park, though, and the momentum is building."

This past summer, politicians were pleasantly surprised to hear part of the project was proceeding at about half a million dollars less than originally expected.

The Hinton Parklander reported town employees originally thought an innovative wastewater treatment plant

would cost about \$2 million. Since then, contracts have been signed based on a fixed cost of \$1.5 million, with an additional \$285,000 for a "green" sewer system.

One town official told the local newspaper that traditional sewer systems would have cost about \$3 million.

"The cost of doing it can vary because it depends on what makes the most sense," says Jim Ireland, chairman of J.C. Ireland Consulting Ltd. in Regina. "There has to be payouts on the economic side."

Ireland added the federal government has been "encouraging" in its support for eco-industrial projects, but "it could always do more."

Another major project is on the north side of Fort McMurray. The Taiganova eco-industrial park has been designed for energy-efficient buildings, lush green landscaping and increased pedestrian use. But many observers can't help but note the irony of the location - right in the middle of Alberta's oilsands territory.

The project will have connected paths for pedestrians or cyclists, alternative stormwater-management systems and buildings that aim for leadership in energy and environmental design (LEED) certification.

Businesses in the park will commit to using at least 10 percent "green power," according to its website.

But the biggest retrofit eco-industrial project right now is in west Toronto, an area which includes the largest airport in the country.

"We were approached about a year ago by the Toronto Region Conservation Authority," says airport spokesman Jeff Armstrong. "We thought it was a great idea."

The Pearson Eco-Business Zone was eventually mapped out to include a 12,000-hectare area of the city, with 12,500 businesses and about 355,000 employees.

But rather than rebuilding existing infrastructure, the zone concentrates on creating partnerships, Armstrong says. The airport already has a co-generation facility onsite, where waste heat is captured by a turbine and turned into electrical power, he adds.

"It's all about ways to collaborate and become more environmentally efficient. Businesses can look at ways to cut their energy consumption and employees can get on board with things like car-pool initiatives. There are all kinds of possibilities," says Armstrong.

Professor emeritus Ray Cote of Halifax's Dalhousie University has been studying eco-industrial parks since about 1991, when he led a pioneering research study on the idea.

Since then, the university's school for resource and environmental studies has been awarded about \$1 million in applied research and development funds.

Representatives of more than 25 countries around the world have consulted with Cote since to get his views on eco-industrial parks. Next month, he will be flying to Japan to present his research at an academic conference there.

"Industrial parks have been around since about the 1920s. The idea was it made it easier for businesses to interact and share resources or best practices," Cote says in a telephone interview from Halifax.

"Tens of thousands of these parks have been created around the world. It's only recently that they have looked at better ways to make use of the land, resources and waste byproducts."

Cote also helped found the Eco-Efficiency Centre in the Halifax suburb of Dartmouth, which looks at ways businesses around the world can work together to be more environmentally efficient.

"I've seen a lot of interest this year from places like British Columbia, Alberta ... Ontario is getting involved. People in the Maritimes are talking about projects. It's growing bigger and bigger each month," Cote says. "China and South Korea have extensive programs in this field, but Canada is becoming stronger and stronger."

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