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Rockwell Collins discusses 15% carbon reduction goal

David DeWitte

MARION – Rockwell Collins doesn't expect its goal of reducing carbon emissions 15 percent by 2014 to come easy.

The company discussed the goal at an inaugural meeting of the Sustainability Network, a group of Iowa business and academic leaders dedicated to making their organizations more sustainable, Monday, June 27, in Marion.

Rockwell Collins set up a Global Sustainability Team in 2008 and 2009. The goal is to reduce the company's carbon footprint globally and lower operating costs by actively managing and reducing energy usage, said team member Brion Hurley, a principal lean consultant.

The scope of the effort covers 35 Rockwell Collins locations across the globe, reducing energy usage by enough to lower carbon dioxide emissions by 24,523 metric tons.

Hurley said the bulk of Rockwell Collins energy comes from electricity, resulting in a primary focus on reducing electric consumption at the company's largest facilities. He said the biggest energy user is the C Avenue complex in Cedar Rapids, followed by operations in Richardson, Texas; Rockwell Collins' Main Plant in Cedar Rapids; the company's Coralville plant and operations in Melbourne, Fla.

Many ideas for lowering energy costs were identified, but determining which projects could really make a dent in the company's 15 percent carbon reduction goal was not so easy. The company created the position of energy project manager, which is responsible for determining which projects warrant investment.

Team member Carolyn Pals said the sustainability initiative arose after she and employee Carrie Wilson attended a University of Iowa seminar that discussed the business case for reducing carbon emissions. She said Wilson proposed they create an informal group called a Community of Practice to meet regularly to transfer knowledge and share experiences in sustainability. The result was the Green Workplace Community of Practice, which brought in luncheon speakers and developed its own ideas.

The group heard from food service provider Aramark about a cafeteria waste composting project at Deere & Co. in Waterloo. It heard recycling ideas from City Carton Recycling, and about ideas to promote cycling to work and telecommuting.

Pals said the group has added a "think green suggestion box" and a box for suggesting community of practice speakers.

Some of the ideas were popular and acceptable but “just not economically feasible,” Pals said, like an idea to install tubes that would bring daylight in to replace electrical lighting in Rockwell Collins buildings.

Hurley said he doesn’t believe most Rockwell Collins are aware of the committee’s work or the range of sustainability initiatives under way at the company yet. One of the group’s goals is to increase the knowledge and involvement of employees in green concepts and strategies.

All of the energy-saving ideas already on the table would still not enable Rockwell Collins to meet the goal if they are all enacted, Hurley said, meaning more good ideas that can be implemented are needed.

About 39 organizations from as far away from Des Moines repounded to invitations from the Iowa Quality Center and Rockwell Collins to attend Monday’s event. Iowa Quality Center Director Gary Nesteby said he hopes the network will become a regular forum for organizations to exchange ideas and best practices in sustainability.

Cedar Rapids companies represented Monday included Nordstrom Director, GE Capital, InTolerance and Alliant Energy. The meeting also brought together representatives of the National Weather Service, University of Iowa, Iowa State University and Linn County Public Health Department.

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