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## BUSINESS

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### Doing well by both Earth and economy

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**JOHN MORGAN**For the State Journal

Since the industrial revolution, Americans have witnessed a decline in the environment at the hands of economic growth. But it doesn't have to be that way, say those involved with Wisconsin's year-old Green Tier program, a unique system that encourages progressive environmental practices.

A two-day event starting Monday will highlight that concept. The event includes four regional bus tours of examples of green businesses and the signing of six Green Tier agreements. On Tuesday, the Wisconsin Environmental Initiative is hosting a conference at Monona Terrace for businesses interested in incorporating Green Tier into their strategies.

"I think Monday and Tuesday are about celebrating the fact that you can pull environment and economy together," said Mark McDermid of the state Department of Natural Resources.

McDermid, director of the DNR's Bureau of Cooperative Environmental Assistance, said nobody really knew how well this program, modeled after progressive green business practices in Bavaria, Germany, would work here. The first year alone was a time of working slowly with patient businesses and organizations to ensure they got things right.

So, while six will sign Green Tier agreements Monday, more than 40 others are in some stage of discussions with the DNR.

"This was really a different animal. And it has taken some time," McDermid said. "We have to remind ourselves, we can't put this on a compliance timeline."

And this is the key difference between the cooperative and proactive nature of Green Tier versus the compliance-driven, policing nature of traditional programs. In the Green Tier system, companies and organizations work with the DNR to establish best management practices and then work to carry them out. As such, each Green Tier agreement is unique and fits the specific needs of each applicant.

"The Green Tier vision is to work within law for systematic approaches that are (not only) responsive to environmental, social and economic needs, but also adaptive for rapidly changing conditions in a global economy," DNR Secretary Scott Hassett said.

That sentiment was echoed by state Sen. Neil Kedzie, R-Elkhorn, who co-authored the Green Tier bill and was a part of a delegation from the state that traveled to Bavaria to learn about green business.

"It's exactly the kind of reform Wisconsin needs - preserving our high standards, rewarding those who meet them, and penalizing those who don't," Kedzie said.

And though many would turn to a prairie or wetland as an archetype of environmentalism, most would not turn to junkyards. Yet under Green Tier, the junky junkyard is replaced by a state-of-the-art recycling facility.

"It truly is an industry that cares about the environment that we work in (and) we live in," said Bob Est, president of the Cooperative Compliance Program (CCP) of Wisconsin's Scrap Metal Recycling Industry, who will be signing a charter on Monday. "We want to be held in high regard. We want that. We want to hold the bar high."

CCP is a national leader in storm-water management practices and points to an industry-wide commitment to improve and preserve environmental conditions across the state.

"As we become more environmentally conscious as a country, and certainly as an industry, that starts to become a factor, and there are benefits. (There are) hard benefits that are measurable, and then there's soft benefits. And sometimes, I don't think we think about the soft benefits enough," said Chris Carpenter, president of Sun Prairie-based Royle Printing, who was also part of the Bavaria delegation and whose company is in the early stages of Green Tier discussions with the state.

An enormous, bus-sized contraption stuck to the side of the plant is a testament to Royle's commitment. This new thermo-oxidizing unit allows Royle to re-use its natural gas exhaust, which translates into a 10 percent reduction in natural gas use and effluent that is 98 percent pure.

"We feel strongly that there is a marketability to it," Carpenter said, referring to running a business that is concerned about the environment. "We also feel strongly that it's how we should behave."

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progressive environmental laws in the country and will receive praise at Monday's event by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency.

In this new way of doing business, the bottom line isn't the bottom line at all, the CCP's Est said. It's a commitment to the future of both business and environment.

"I want my grandkids to enjoy the same clean air, clean soil and clean water that I've enjoyed," he said.

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