

Putting green in your pocket

Asheville-based Waste Reduction

Partners uses a statewide team of 65 retired engineers and scientists to provide free assessments of how to reduce utility costs, hit goals for using sustainable energy sources and effectively use renewable energy. For-profit companies make up nearly half of its client base, with the rest coming from government and nonprofits. Since 2000, it has visited about 1,300 sites and saved clients an estimated \$23 million. In its latest fiscal year, it worked with 62 businesses. Started in 1992 as part of Land-of-Sky Regional Council, a government planning organization for four counties, WRP has gone statewide in recent years and has an office in Research Triangle Park. Its \$470,000 annual budget comes from government and foundation sources. Terry Albrecht is its director.

Are most of your clients still in the west?

It's pretty evenly spread out. We probably are doing a little bit more in the west. Last year, we did like 250 on-site assessments, and over 100 were out of our RTP office.

What's the main focus?

There are three major areas — energy, water and solid-waste management — but there might be other special environmental projects. We do work in fleet management and alternative-fuel vehicles. We see less of that in the private sector. We also work in storm-water management. If folks have industrial storm-water requirements, we might help them on those.

What generates the most demand for your services: cost reduction, sustainable energy projects or renewable energy?

Cost reduction. Our unique approach is that we might have a plant manager or plant engineer that retired from DuPont, and he's sitting down one-on-one with a smaller manufacturer or a small business



and helping them, sharing that expertise on how they can make gains in reducing operating costs.

What kind of results have you gotten?

For every dollar invested in our program, our clients get \$4 worth of savings. Half of that or more is through energy cost savings, or it may be solid-waste savings or other utility cost savings.

Have you seen an increase in demand for your services?

We've seen about a 30% increase in call volume since we've been in a more challenging economy. A lot of work in the energy marketplace, especially energy efficiency, has been driven by federal stimulus dollars.

And hard times get people thinking about cost cutting.

Some of the folks we've helped were just trying to span a really tough spot in the economy, and they were looking for our advice on how to reallocate the energy-using resources in their plant because their production volume had been down so low, and their monthly overhead cost to keep these machines running was killing them. So we've gotten feedback from some folks saying, 'Man, you've helped us save our business, because we were in such a tight bind a few months back and you helped us figure out how to cut those utility costs.'