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David Carroll Explains Sustainability

BY ADAM MADISON

Lafarge North America has always been a leader in the environmental arena. The company has many success stories of wildlife restoration, solid fuels programs and mitigation. Although it is not always easy to quantify, these all pay off in the long run.

David Carroll, vice president of environmental and public affairs, explains that the company may have an environmental edge due to its European influence. He says sustainability became popular in Europe before the notion landed in the United States. This is because of nongovernmental organizations that began trumpeting the issue years ago. Minority stockholders also grew more critical of companies' sustainability reports. The message was loud and clear.

The aggregates industry is dealing in a commodity of limited quantity, especially in densely populated areas overseas. So in order to sustain itself, the industry had to begin looking at innovative methods of conservation. These European companies that had a ravenous appetite for U.S. companies are now a driving force. Mostly, because they know that sustainability works.

GOOD GUYS REAP BENEFITS

"If you are perceived as a socially responsible company that is doing the right thing, you have a better chance of getting permits with less confrontation," Carroll says. "If you are perceived as nonresponsive and doing the wrong thing all of the time, it becomes a little more challenging."

But sustainability goes beyond public relations; it ties directly into the efficiencies built into an operation. Water, fuel and electricity all are increasingly costly. Lafarge now is experimenting with solar power on its aggregate plants and biofuels for its ready-mixed concrete trucks. Carroll also encourages operations to avoid dependence on the general water source. He suggests creating reservoirs, which can continue to provide water long after an operation is spent, and can be sold or exchanged.

Carroll reiterates: "The companies that are the most responsive and are the most innovative will be the most profitable in the long term."

MANAGING INITIATIVES

Ultimately, the success of an operation's environmental efforts is in the hands of management. "If you have a manager that is a clear leader and knows what the policies are, it will get done," Carroll says.

One of the biggest leaders at Lafarge today is Dave Nelson, general manager at Presque Isle Quarry, an operation in northern Michigan. This site has received help preserving wildlife from both the Wild Turkey Federation and the Wildlife Habitat Council.

Teaming up with groups such as these is an excellent way to take an operation to the next level, Carroll explains. In addition to WTF and WHC, Lafarge also has worked with Ducks Unlimited, World Wildlife Federation and Habitat for Humanity - to name just a few. Volunteer organizations always approach a job with enthusiasm.

"Boy Scouts, Girl Scouts," Carroll says. "My goodness, get out of their way. They are going to do something."

These relationships have little cost beyond hot dogs and hamburgers, but the benefits can be endless. Lafarge, obviously, is enhancing the value of its land and preserving positive relationships with the communities, but it also is helping train future engineers and scientists.

The notion of sustainability also extends far beyond the life of a quarry or pit. The days of abandoning operations as they expire are long gone. Each company is held to an exit strategy that was most likely negotiated during the permitting phase. It can be anything from a wildlife refuge to a golf course or a new housing development to a retention pond. Whatever it is, some form of reclamation has to be done.

A TRUE LEADER

Carroll has achieved his own environmental fame by working in the industry. He is a former board chairman for the Wildlife Habitat Council and has remained active with the group since the late 1990s. Earlier in his career, he spent six years working for the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency as an air enforcement attorney. He was recently recognized with a Resolution of Appreciation from the NSSGA for his accomplishments at WHC.



SUSTAINABLE PROFIT

Industries increasingly are creating environmental initiatives that reduce energy consumption, increase profits or simply maintain positive community relations. The aggregates industry is a leading example. Tell us about your efforts today by e-mailing amadison@rockproducts.com [amadison@rockproducts.com]



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