

March 17, 2008

## Going Green: Local businesses ride hybrid vehicle bandwagon

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Going green isn't just for St. Patrick's Day. In fact, some companies are beginning to make it a priority every day.

You can't help but hear the latest buzz words: "Going Green".

Local groups that are in the business of being environmentally friendly want to "practice what they preach" as they do business with their clients and they are now focusing on fuel-efficient cars.

The Toyota Prius and the Ford Escape Hybrid are the ones that most companies have their eyes on.

"If you roll into town in a big SUV and then talk to the clients about fuel efficiency, it doesn't help your sales point if you're trying to get clients to do the same thing," says Jeff Wells with Black and Veatch, a Kansas City based environmental engineering firm. "We need to walk the walk and talk the talk." Black and Veatch, with a small office in Greenville, has purchased 10 Hybrid Ford Escapes and 25 E85 compatible trucks for its fleets throughout the country.

"What we do is going to be around for a long time, so going green is good," says Wells.

The Greenville office focuses on wastewater treatment plants and water systems.

When Greenville's SynTerra Corporation set its goals for this year's performance, "staying green" was a top priority.

The company, also an environmental engineering firm, has added four hybrids to its fleet – two Toyota Priuses, a Toyota Highlander Hybrid and a Hybrid Ford Escape.

"We believe we need to be doing our part to reduce our environmental impacts," says Mark Taylor, SynTerra's president. "The great gas mileage and reduced emissions are helping reduce our local carbon footprint." The downtown company uses the cars daily for projects around the Upstate.

According to Toyota, the Prius gets 48 miles to the gallon in the city and 45 on the highway. The cars start at \$21,815. The Ford Escape gets 34 mpg in the city and 30 for the highway and start at \$26,505.

Richard Probst, sales manager for Toyota of Greenville, says Prius sales are increasing.

"Companies are saving money and the cars cut down on pollution," he says. One thing the dealership says is helping increase sales is advertising using the "Green Zone" slogan. Whether it's an ad in the newspaper, a section of their showroom or on the streets in a local festival, the "Green Zone," which began seven months ago, is drawing attention to Toyota's fuel-efficient cars.

"They're ordering a lot more 'Green Zone' vehicles," says Rob Young, president of Communicating Results Advertising, a Greenville company that handles advertising for several local car dealerships. "It's known as the 'Green Zone' dealership."

Nationwide sales of the Prius have increased 37 percent when comparing Jan. 2007 to Jan. 2008, according to Chad Harp, a Toyota spokesperson. "People do associate 'green' with the Prius," he says.

Taylor has noticed the operating cost of the Prius is very low compared to others and SynTerra will continue to upgrade its fleet with more fuel-efficient cars.

Both Fairway Ford in Anderson and Vic Bailey Ford in Spartanburg haven't been able to get enough Hybrid Escapes and have several being ordered from Ford plants. "We're having to send people away," says an employee at Fairway Ford. The dealership has seen an increase in demand from companies and individuals.

The City of Greenville also is purchasing environmentally friendly cars and working to reduce car emissions. One Prius and two Hybrid Ford Escapes have been purchased by the city as well as 15 E85 vehicles. An E85 uses 85 percent ethanol and 15 percent gasoline. Several cars can be modified to run on E85.

Tom Keith, the city's environmental program manager, says the city is adding these cars to the public works department fleet.

"They help by reducing our use of fossil fuels and the emission of a variety of greenhouse gases through the use of alternative fuels, electricity and ethanol," says Keith.

In an effort to reduce emissions on the roadways, the city conducted a Woodruff Road Signal Timing Project to decrease idle times for cars.

"It maximized the flow of traffic to reduce emissions associated with idling," says Keith.

The results were positive with decreases in Hydrocarbons, Carbon Monoxides and Nitrous Oxides. . "It's part of the city's efforts to continually improve our environmental presence," says Keith.