



The business case for greening your grounds

By Richard T. Murphy Jr. | Thursday, April 22, 2010

With the 40th anniversary of Earth Day upon us, I'd like to take a moment to reflect on what many businesses do when they decide to "go green."

Most of the time, business leaders focus on the inside of their facilities, from upgrading lighting and HVAC systems to initiating recycling programs. Some businesses take things one step further and complete LEED certification. (In the interest of full disclosure, our company, Murphy Warehouse Co., has undertaken many of these initiatives as well.)

Yet many of these companies' facilities are still surrounded by traditional lawns that not only are expensive to maintain, but require chemical fertilization treatments to stay green — and create runoff that poisons our beloved lakes, streams and rivers.

Life,
meet learning.

That's why I believe businesses can and should do more by truly "greening your grounds" with native prairies, stormwater management systems and tree plantings — greenery that is not only beautiful, but enhances — not hurts — the environment.

If your immediate response is, "No, it's too expensive," or "I won't see any return on the investment," let me share Murphy Warehouse's experiences and actual dollar amounts we've saved.

Big savings tracked

We are a fourth generation logistics firm with several local warehouse facilities. We began greening our grounds around facilities more than 15 years ago and we have tracked our annual expenditures since then. All told, we have saved more than \$500,000 in costs — with our largest cost savings still to come!

If you are based in Minneapolis, you are certain to have a fee associated with the Metropolitan Surface Water Management Act — 1,400 other

U.S. cities also have this fee. Since 2006, Murphy Warehouse Co. was charged a \$68,000 annual assessment fee to the City of Minneapolis for management of stormwater that had fallen on our 95 percent impervious, 22-acre, 105 year-old headquarters campus. Finding a way to mitigate stormwater, and the assessment fee, became a priority for us.

In 2007, we consulted with a local engineering firm to design and construct a stormwater system with a retention basin and three additional rain gardens to collect 95 percent of the rainwater that falls on our campus.

On Earth Day last year, we invited Mayor R.T. Rybak to the "opening" of the system. He shared his sentiments on the project with the crowd in attendance: "In one of the greenest cities in America, on an Earth Day filled with people doing amazing things, this is the single best green value that I can see in Minneapolis."

System eliminated the fee

Post-construction analysis showed that the \$580,000 system *eliminated* the stormwater assessment fee, leading to a return on the investment in just over eight years.

As a landscape architect, I took things one step further and installed native prairies around the stormwater system, increasing its efficiency, eliminating the use of fertilization and water waste from automatic sprinklers, and saving additional money through reduced maintenance costs.

For example, at our Fridley Logistics Campus, a similar prairie installation requires \$2,240 per year for six acres of prairie upkeep instead of \$21,650 per year for only four acres of cut lawn on the site.

Several organizations took notice, including the [Minnesota Pollution Control Agency](#) (MPCA). And following its own review of the stormwater system, the MPCA has included the project as a model in its regulations materials.

Much room for progress in Twin Cities

In recent conversations with the City of Minneapolis it's our understanding that the Murphy stormwater system is *still the first and only* stormwater system of its kind to be voluntarily constructed on an existing, heavy-use industrial site in Minneapolis. In some sense, Murphy is proud of this achievement, but it serves as a reminder that there is room for progress regarding environmental and sustainability issues in Minneapolis and the Twin Cities at large.

All told we now have 14 acres in native prairies — beautiful plantings that attract wildlife, including raptors, song birds, deer and foxes, create a buffer zone between our sites and the surrounding neighborhood, and help the Earth — in addition to helping our own bottom line. Our neighbors love our plantings; our customers ask about how we can help them become more green; and our own employees take pride in our efforts.

So on this Earth Day, I'd encourage other business leaders to consider the business case for greening your grounds. I welcome communications

from those of you who are interested in learning more. It's good for your company, your customers and your bottom line — not to mention the environment. A true win-win, indeed!

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