

Going 'green,' reaping green

MassMutual finds that environmentally conscious practices pay dividends

by JACK FLYNN

Something odd began happening at the MassMutual Financial Group last year.

The Styrofoam coffee cups – emblems of high-achieving, highly caffeinated office culture – began disappearing from cubicles and the cafeteria at the company's Springfield headquarters. Within weeks, they were gone, replaced by reusable plastic mugs with environmentally friendly symbols and logos.

Chalk up another victory for recycling – and a defeat for Styrofoam and the throw-away culture it symbolizes.

One of the region's largest employers, MassMutual has also emerged as a leader among the environmentally conscious corporations in Greater Springfield, converting itself from late-20th century mindset to an oasis of green policies and practices.

"As a corporation, we always had a commitment to using resources wisely," said Sean F. Anderson, assistant vice president of facilities operations and director of corporate green initiatives. "But, now it is more of a public commitment and showing our corporate responsibility."

MassMutual is hardly alone. The eco-friendly, green philosophy espoused by former Vice President Al Gore and embraced by newly elected President Barack Obama has taken root in boardrooms, offices and warehouses across the region.

Whether from financial pragmatism, good corporate citizenship or shrewd public relations instincts, companies are changing the way they do business.

"We have reached the tipping point; people are realizing we're in trouble, and are clamoring for this," said Erica R. Gees, an architect for the Amherst-based Kuhn-Riddle design firm.

"There's nothing like the bottom line to motivate



Sean D. Anderson, assistant vice president of facilities operations and director of corporate green initiatives for MassMutual Financial Group, holds an old fluorescent tube while standing in front of other lighting fixtures that were replaced as part of the company's efforts to save energy.

corporations to cut back on energy waste," Gees said. "And it looks good to the public, too."

At MassMutual, a sprawling campus of buildings dating back to mid-1920s, the transformation is far from complete.

But already the company's "Green Team," as its environmental leadership group is called, has produced changes that would have been hard to imagine a decade ago.

The coffee cups are just one example. By its estimate, the company used 17,000 a month at its State Street campus. By issuing refillable plastic mugs to each employee, the company avoided sending 204,000 Styrofoam cups to landfills each year.

Water conservation is another major emphasis.

Sinks, toilets and other plumbing fixtures have been replaced in the past year, a move the company hopes will save 5 million gallons of water a year.

That, Anderson explains, is enough to fill 250 average-size swimming pools.

Saving energy is another top priority, which means everything from encouraging carpooling and taking advantage of natural light in office design to regularly monitoring the energy efficiency of rooms and buildings.

Not that squeezing the most out of MassMutual's power grid is a simple task; the company's home office alone covers 1.4 million square feet, with additional corporate outposts in downtown Springfield, Chicopee and Enfield.

But in a sign of how serious the company has become about energy conservation, MassMutual is applying for certification for Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design for Existing Buildings, a kind of gold standard in the environmental field.

The pursuit of eco-excellence extends to the 38.4-acre lawn, which maintains its lush, golf-ready

look with a minimum of pesticides and fertilizers.

As architect of the company's green plan, Anderson is quick to give credit to others, including employees who often come up with suggestions and requests. "The level of employee engagement is probably the thing we're most proud of," Anderson said.

The company's zeal extends beyond its employees and buildings; as a policy, MassMutual wants contractors, suppliers and clients to share their environmentally conscious approach, Anderson said.

All the recycling and retrofitting does not clash with one of MassMutual's biggest obligations: client confidentiality. The company makes sure its internal paperwork – the policies held by its clients, and related documents – never winds up in someone's recycling bin.

The documents are shredded and disposed of by contractors who specialize in handling sensitive data, Anderson said.

"That's always been very strictly regulated," Anderson said. "And it still is."

