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Our View: Poland Spring Finds Little Things Add Up

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There are those, of course, who believe the world would be a better place if Poland Spring capped its wells, parked its trucks, turned off its lights and closed its doors — all to spare the world the curse of plastic bottles.

We have never shared that belief, instead seeing the company as a relatively clean industry that provides jobs for hundreds of Mainers, many of them in our own communities.

Our faith in the company's environmental efforts was recently confirmed by the Environmental Defense Fund, which recognized Poland Spring for reducing the environmental impact of its truck fleet. The company's efforts show that saving money and saving the environment can go hand in hand. (The EDF is funded by foundations and donations, and accepts no corporate money.) Poland Spring has a large fleet — 36 tractortrailers and 75 tanker trailers, each of which holds 8,400 gallons of water. The trucks operate around the clock bringing water from nine springs to their bottling plants.

"I'll be honest with you," fleet manager Chris McKenna told the EDF, "what got us started was \$5 a gallon fuel."

In 2007, Poland Spring began using a biodiesel blend called B5 for its trucks, which is made from agricultural waste products. Fuel economy increased marginally, 0.1 mpg, but the company saved 5 to 12 cents per gallon by using the B5 blend.

In 2008, the company looked at the idling time of its fleet.

Using onboard computers, the firm found that its trucks were idling as much as 1,400 hours per month during the winter.

The Poland Spring used an existing onboard computer system to rank its 65 drivers by their total idling times, and posted the list. The 10 drivers with the least idling time each month got gift cards to buy fuel for their own cars.

Idling time dropped from 1,400 hours in February 2007 to 1,000 hours in February 2008 to 380 hours in February 2009 — cutting fuel consumption by 8,000 gallons and greenhouse gas emissions by 77 tons per year, saving about \$20,000 in 2008.

That's certainly significant savings.

The company is now reducing its top truck speed by two miles per hour, mapping out fuel-saving routes and testing the use of synthetic oil, which is initially more expensive but which lasts much longer.

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In addition to Poland Spring, the EDF also recognized Carrier, a heating, air conditioning and refrigeration manufacturer, and Novo Nordisk, a global health care company.

Carrier has reduced its fleet emissions by 30 percent, saving \$1 million per year, while Novo Nordisk has reduced its fleet emissions by 24 percent in the first six months of this year.

The three firms serve as models for innovation.

Our standard of living in the U.S. is based on two things — our robust economy and an equally healthy environment.

The continued efforts of these three companies show that with some ingenuity and diligence both are possible.