



The Coast Chilliwack Hotel was one of three winners in the first-ever Sustainable Business Awards, a Business Improvement Areas of B.C. initiative.

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Business group launches new awards in partnership with BC Hydro

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Maybe it was the in-room coffee spoons that are made from potatoes. (Fully compostable, helping reduce waste sent to landfill.) Or the elimination of Styrofoam products.

Whatever it was, the Coast Chilliwack Hotel caught the judges' eyes with their submission to the first-ever Sustainable Business Awards bestowed by the Business Improvement Areas of B.C. (BIABC). The hotel was recently chosen as the award winner for the Metro Vancouver/Fraser Valley region.

For Vancouver Island, the winner was the Cowichan Green Community Society, which works to promote food security and nurture relationships between the community and the environment. The third Sustainable Business winner for the Interior region is Plainsman Companies, a leader in green building and LEED certification, both in new building construction and in the operations of buildings they own.

The awards are sponsored by BC Hydro Power Smart and were judged by a pair of Team Power Smart leaders – Vancity CEO Tamara Vrooman and Salient Group President Robert Fung.

"The awards have created some new awareness around sustainability," says Stephanie Clarke, executive director of BIABC. "When you offer awards, there are obviously some businesses that have done some incredible steps to look at all their activities and improve. But it also shows that even taking smaller steps can still be significant; it opens up a dialogue that helps overcome that thinking of 'Well, nothing I do will have any impact because it's so small.'

"Companies doing smaller things didn't necessarily receive the award, but because we're learning about them, there is an opportunity for them to get credit. So in that sense the program was more successful than just the awards themselves."

For BC Hydro, sponsoring the BIABC Sustainable Business Awards program provided an opportunity to promote energy efficiency and help share the stories of companies already on the path to sustainability. Clarke says she is interested in repeating the program next year.

"It's a learning curve, too, to find out what people are interested in, and what triggers actually get them to respond," she says. "Obviously you want people to take action because it's the responsible thing to do, but at the same time this program helps people understand that they can save money doing this. It's a nice feeling when something is good for your community and the rest of the world, but actually saves you money."

Clarke is keen to support Business Improvement Associations in helping their members shift towards sustainability, while recognizing the constraints faced by small business.

"Sustainability is not at the forefront of many business plans, but it is really important and it needs to be moved forward, so BIAs are looking at new ways of dealing with that," she says. "We need to communicate with members in ways that are not overwhelming and make it a little easier for someone to adopt.

"We're excited to work with BC Hydro. They want to get out in front of small business especially – and they see partnering with us as a way to do that because we can connect them to all those businesses across B.C. It's an ideal partnership."

Nina Winham is a Vancouver-based sustainability consultant and regular contributor to bchydro.com.

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