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Whistler-Blackcomb garners inaugural environment award
Energy-efficiency measures reduce greenhouse gas emissions by 450 tonnes

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By Andrew Mitchell

In 2005 Whistler-Blackcomb took a chance on a small Whistler/Vancouver company called Sempa Power Systems, which employs a system of controllers and software to maximize the energy efficiency of buildings. Based on the success of the first installation in the Glacier Creek Lodge, Whistler-Blackcomb wasted no time in expanding the program to include the Roundhouse Lodge and Legends building in Creekside.

Those efforts, as well as the mountains' ongoing programs to reduce waste, reduce energy consumption and switch to renewable sources, were the main factors in the decision of AWARE to present Whistler-Blackcomb with the first 2006 Business Environmental Award.

Mountain planning and environmental resource manager Arthur DeJong was on hand to receive the award, which was presented at Enviro Fest on Saturday. Although the mountains have received several other awards in the past, including the top award presented by the ski industry, DeJong said the AWARE award is significant.

"Although we have won awards internationally, in many ways being recognized by our own community means the most to us," said DeJong. "Whistler can only become a sustainable resort through strong community partnerships and working towards common goals. That's why it's so exciting to be in this community, we're so partnered as opposed to polarized in finding environmental resolutions."

In the past 12 months of using Sempa's power system – which alternates between propane and electricity based on peak energy use – the mountains have reduced greenhouse gas emissions by almost 450 tonnes. In addition, the mountains have saved an estimated \$153,000 in energy costs.

For most projects Sempa says the payback of investing in a system is between four and five years although every installation is different. More than 10 properties in town are currently using or in the process of adopting Sempa systems.

"Taking care of the environment can be profitable," said DeJong. "And when you demonstrate this you can really influence the marketplace to change to more sustainable operations. It's really a two-pronged story – greenhouse gas reductions as well as cost savings.

"We're very pleased, very proud to receive this award. We also know that the work has just begun here and we have a long journey ahead of us to reach the end goal of being a fully sustainable ski operation and mountain resort."

Businesses were nominated to the AWARE board who evaluated each candidate based on the steps they've taken to reduce waste, cut energy consumption, organize employee transportation or otherwise protect the environment.

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