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California firms hope to turn green into gold

Expo seeks to educate consumers on recycled goods

By Ngoc Nguyen - ngnguyen@sacbee.com

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For companies devoted to eco-friendly wares and services, it is not enough that California is at the vanguard of the green business movement.

Manufacturers must convince consumers that their new products are good, not just good for the environment.

That's what Stockton-based Timbron International hopes to accomplish at the Green California Summit and Expo in Sacramento, which starts today.

Timbron recycles Styrofoam into interior trim and moldings. Home Depot carries the company's wares, but Timbron still has to work on educating potential customers, said Heather Gadonniex, the firm's sustainability and marketing manager.

Timbron products are made from 90 percent recycled content, collected in the region. Installing the materials in area buildings closes the local recycling loop, Gadonniex said.

"We really want to get the message out to the local community that Styrofoam is recycling, and it's recycling in Sacramento's backyard," she said.

So far, though, consumers have hesitated about molding that is technically "plastic" and not wood, she said.

Timbron President Steve Lacey said the moldings are comparable in price with pine, but more expensive than medium-density fiberboard, a type of particle board.

"It really hasn't rung the cash register yet. But, we understand that. It all takes incremental steps," Lacey said.

At the green technology expo, Lacy and Gadonniex hope to find buyers among area builders and local and state governments.

Timbron works with the California Integrated Waste Management Board on sustainability projects and hopes to get a boost from the state's green building initiatives.

Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger has set a goal of reducing energy use by 20 percent in state-owned buildings by 2015. The state has also adopted international environmental standards for its new and refurbished buildings.

Timbron isn't the only company hoping to capitalize on this potential market.

Green Expo organizers expect more than 3,500 attendees, including 200 national and California companies with products and services such as green cleaning supplies, energy-efficient lighting, fuel-cell technology and electric-powered vehicles.

Racquel Palmese of Green Technology, the expo's organizers, said large-scale buyers in attendance will include hospitals, universities, Indian tribes and prisons.

Ben Finkelor of University of California, Davis' Energy Efficiency Center said the event is a chance for manufacturers to network with large-scale consumers.

California's "buying power," the interest in energy-efficient products among consumers and government, will help get green technology adopted, Finkelor said.

Still, it's not easy getting consumers to move to new products simply because they're labeled green, said Timbron's Lacey. "That's all being defined and analyzed by the general public," he said.

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