AF&PA Sustainability Awards: Honoring Members' Accomplishments
By Donna Harman, President and CEO, AF&PA

AF&PA recently recognized seven member companies for their commitment to sustainability through our 2015 AF&PA Sustainability Awards. The awards recognize exemplary sustainability achievements in the paper and wood products manufacturing industry. These annual awards are part of the industry’s demonstration of continuous improvement under AF&PA’s Better Practices, Better Planet 2020 initiative.

AF&PA sustainability award applicants are considered in two primary categories, leadership and innovation. Projects that support the Better Practices, Better Planet 2020 sustainability goals are considered for “Leadership in Sustainability” awards. Within the Leadership category, there are five possible awards that correspond to the goals: Paper Recovery for Recycling, Energy Efficiency/Greenhouse Gas (GHG) Reduction, Sustainable Forest Management, Safety, and Water. The “Innovation in Sustainability” award is reserved for projects that merit recognition for their contribution to sustainable business practices, rather than one of the specific goals.

Seaman Paper Company received a Leadership in Sustainability Award (small company) for Energy Efficiency and GHG Reduction for their Soft Steps Forward Initiative. Seaman Paper sought to decrease their purchased fuel and electricity dependency. The company now produces 97 percent of their steam requirements from carbon-neutral biomass, and installed a backpressure turbine that runs on steam to meet their electricity needs. These measures helped decrease Seaman Paper’s total energy cost despite the sharp increases in oil and electricity costs over the past decade.

WestRock Company also received a Leadership in Sustainability Award for Energy Efficiency and GHG Reduction. Their Covington Power Island Project uses carbon-neutral biomass to generate renewable electricity for sale to the grid and supplies clean energy to their Covington, Virginia paper mill. It has enabled the mill to become electrically self-sufficient, greatly reduce coal use and greenhouse gas emissions, decrease freshwater usage and generate less waste water.

Evergreen Packaging was recognized with the Leadership in Sustainability Award for Paper Recovery for Recycling for the On-Packaging Recycle Use project. Surveys show that consumers look for a recycle logo on a carton to determine whether it is recyclable. Evergreen developed and implemented a tracking system to find out which customers did not use a logo on their cartons. This information is used to get more customers to include the logo on their cartons and communicate to consumers that those cartons are recyclable, thereby increasing recovery.

Resolute Forest Products received the Leadership in Sustainability Award for Safety for their Working Towards Zero Incidents project. A multi-disciplinary task force at Resolute took the initiative to design a safer, watertight, more comfortable, breathable chemical protective suit that is appropriate for all mill-related working requirements. In addition, the new suits can be used for at least a year, as opposed to the previous disposable suits, of which an employee would use and discard about five per month.

International Paper was awarded the Leadership in Sustainability Award for Water for their Pensacola Mill/Emerald Coast Utilities Authority (ECUA) Partnership project. Through the partnership, International Paper’s containerboard mill in Pensacola, Florida receives treated effluent from ECUA that it uses in its industrial processes. This allowed International Paper to reduce its freshwater consumption, while ECUA has found a beneficial outlet for its treated effluent.

Domtar received two awards. The first was the Leadership in Sustainability Award for Sustainable Forest Management for their Marlboro FSC Partnership. FSC certification can be pricey for small landowners, but paper companies often need FSC certified fiber to meet specific customer demands. Through the Marlboro FSC Partnership, Domtar covers certification costs and pays a premium to receive certified fiber, and landowners receive advice and support in getting their wood certified.

Domtar’s second award was an Innovation in Sustainability Award for the Plymouth K-Lime Project. Their Plymouth, North Carolina mill reduced its waste stream to zero by creating K-Lime, a substitute for traditional fertilizer that consists of byproducts of the manufacturing process that were previously sent to landfill. K-Lime is all-natural and works just as well as traditional fertilizer, and Domtar provides it to farmers at a third of the cost.

Verso Corporation was also recognized with an Innovation in Sustainability Award for the Identifying and Mapping Vernal Pools on State Lands in Michigan’s Upper Peninsula project is a public-private partnership focusing on vernal pools: small, shallow, temporary bodies of water that are important for healthy forest ecosystems because they provide food, water and habitat for a number of animal and plant species. Aerial photograph interpretation and other technologies are used to identify and map vernal pools, so that they will not be overlooked and unintentionally damaged or destroyed.

These award-winning initiatives demonstrate AF&PA members’ commitment to better business practices and the sustainability of our industry, our communities, and our environment. The number of high quality project submissions continues to grow each year, representing the numerous concrete actions our industry is taking to improve the sustainability of our processes and products.

For more information about AF&PA’s Sustainability Awards program and Better Practices, Better Planet 2020 initiative, visit www.afandpa.org/sustainability.