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News

Opinion: Realities of green water

Thursday, March 05, 2009

By Daryl Hawkins

“It’s not easy being green.”
– Kermit the Frog

Waikaloa, Hawaii - Here on the west coast of the island of Hawaii in a nondescript and unassuming building, Swiss-born research scientist Markus Lenger quietly goes about the business of improving our planet. Markus has located his principal offices in Hawaii, not because he is overly fond of tropical drinks with tiny pastel parasols, but because here is where you will find 11 of the world’s 13 climate zones, each with unique ecosystems and weather characteristics.

Forty-four-year-old Lenger is the co-founder of Hydrologix (www.hydrologixgroup.com) a company dedicated to “Innovative biological systems for wastewater remediation,” but whose motto does not begin to describe the passion with which the engaging and gregarious scientist approaches the subject of water quality. In 1989, the then-23-year-old research assistant was part of a team utilizing laser-activated surfactants to aid in the Exxon Valdez cleanup. He watched in horror as an Alaskan brown bear died in front of him after having ingested oil polluted fish. It was a seminal moment and has resulted in Lenger treating his vocation as a calling, rather than simply another venture. He is surrounded by the same kind of committed team members, perhaps better described as acolytes or disciples.

In the company’s compact, efficient, and eco-friendly offices - adorned with sepia colored photographs of the scientist Nikola Tesla - departments including a state-of-the-art water-quality testing lab, information technology and conferencing, engineering and manufacturing are housed in rooms no larger than bedrooms in a typical suburban home. Bookcases are full of exotic and specialized research journals that sit alongside more mundane titles dealing with basic management principals, and walls support huge erasable boards displaying systems operations and sales objectives.

Here in the West, where we live by the axiom that, “Whiskey is for drinking and water is for fighting over,” we understand the importance of a clean and reliable water supply. The admittedly unglamorous process of changing grease or sewage wastewater into a nontoxic and innocuous product that can

Monday, March 09, 2009



Mostly

Cloudy

21°

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- Music**
Open Mic Night
6:00 PM
at Elevated Grounds
- Music**
Dakota Country
9:00 PM
at the Million Dollar
- Music**
Dakota Country
9:00 PM
at the Million Dollar
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- 3/3/2009 | 7:13 PM
[End of the 2009 Wyoming Legislative Session](#)
- 2/19/2009 | 10:29 PM
[remote-controlled go-carts to Mars...](#)
- 2/6/2009 | 10:35 PM
[The Zombification of the American Dream](#)

planet polls



be safely returned into the “water chain” is the compelling vision of the founder of this high tech startup.

Utilizing highly proprietary technology which includes microbe infusion delivered through a simple but effective hardware platform connected to 24/7 telemetry and monitoring, waste byproducts, some of which have a half life of 500 years in a landfill, are returned to the supply stream in a state that can, with little treatment, be turned into potable water. Currently much of the so-called “brown grease” found in grease interceptors and traps is “pumped and dumped” into existing land fills, which simply kicks the can down the road where eventually it will have to be dealt with.

Main Poll

Do you play in a regular poker game?

- Yes
- No

Vote!

Total of voters : 44

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Lenger faces all of the typical challenges of such fledgling enterprises: Access to capital, developing competencies outside of his fields of study, and recruiting and retaining skilled staff. Additionally, he has been forced to master the arcane and inconsistently applied world of environmental law, specifically the provisions that deal with the EPA’s Clean Water Act and successive pollution control laws.

Although a philosophical free-market libertarian, Lenger supports the CWA and gives the law praise for its goals to improve our water quality. His problem with the law is its haphazard and inconsistent enforcement from jurisdiction to jurisdiction, which is dependent on local interpretation and compliance. His system has been endorsed by the County of Maui, achieved grudging acceptance on Oahu after several battles, and has been challenged on the Island of Hawaii, where one Hawaiian state official told Lenger that she did not care if waste grease was dumped down a lava tube, just so the issue did not end up on her desk.

And there’s the rub – entrenched bureaucracy versus new technology. Lenger has found allies in such groups as the Surfrider Foundation and the Sierra Club, but he knows that ultimately this is his battle to fight and win. Those of us who believe in the marketplace and in the environment should support his efforts by contacting our elected officials and asking them to fast track approval for this green solution. PJH

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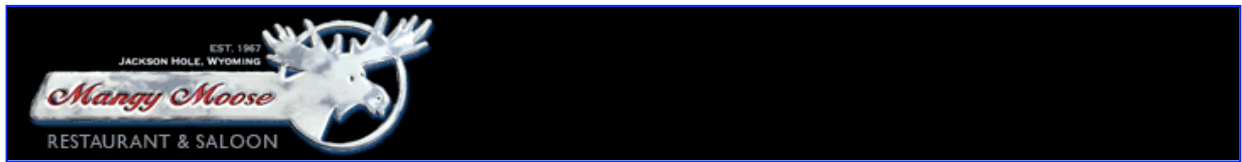
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