

Environmentalism meets real estate

By THERESE FITZGERALD

In his office filled with photos of the rain forest and furniture recycled from old wood and plastics, Richard Fuller seems far removed from the world of towering office buildings and bustling hotels.

But, in fact, due to the city's stepped-up recycling effort, the Australian-born environmentalist is joining in the daily operations of some of New York City's most active commercial structures.

Fuller, president of Great Forest, has been assisting owners of some 210 commercial buildings -- 55 million square feet, including some of the city's largest office building and hotels, implement aggressive recycling programs and, in turn, save significant sums of money. They are currently working with the Waldorf Astoria to do a total "renovation" of their trash systems.

The more recyclables an owner separates out, Fuller said, the more valuable his garbage becomes. At one Midtown office building, \$7,000 in monthly trash carting costs was reduced to \$3,000 and a major hotel reduced its monthly trash carting costs from \$8,000 to \$4,500.

"When we set it up and do it as intensely as possible, you can save a lot of money," said Fuller.

Beginning Sept. 30, all commercial businesses in the city will have to separate out their recyclables on-site (see Page 1). Previously, separation by the private carters was permissible, but that has been found to be not in compliance with state law.

As chair of its Solid Waste Committee, Fuller represented the Building Owners and Managers Association (BOMA) in negotiations to formulate the regulations. The rules were also created with input from the Real Estate Board of New York, the Trade Waste Association, which represents the private carters of New York City, and other interested environmental and community groups.

Owners will have the option, Fuller said, of commingling all their recyclables into one container or sorting out the individual items and maximizing their value.

"[Owners] can get into it seriously and

save a lot of money or they can think it's just too much of a bother," he said.

Fuller said he has been helping owners turn roughly half their trash into recyclable items.

"If anyone tells you you can recycle 80 percent of the building, it's just not true," he said.

Great Forest first does a trash audit to find out how much trash a building generates, how much carting services costs and what the different recyclables are worth.

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"There's a lot of science to it, a lot of spreadsheets we work up on it," Fuller said. "It's a whole plan."

Then they assist in the implementation of a recycling plan, which may begin by renegotiating fees and routines with the trash haulers. They then provide signs, bins, education for tenants and arrange for the different recyclables to be picked up. Great Forest provides monthly reports and newsletters and at night they do tours of the building, placing friendly reminder stickers where tenants do not appear to be in compliance.

Fuller said recycling is a time-intensive process that he can take off owners' hands.

"We know how to do this and do it well," he said. "It takes me about a year."

Fuller founded his environmental services firm four years ago after returning to New York -- he had first come here to work for the United Nations -- from a stint in the Brazilian Rain Forest.

"I was flat broke," he said. "I had no idea what I was going to do."

When commercial recycling began to gain steam, Fuller relied on his knowledge of the corporate culture, having worked for IBM for a time, and started



With the push toward recycling, environmentalist Richard Fuller, president of Great Forest, has become a member of the real estate community.

introducing his practical conservation ideas to major building operators and users.

"I really didn't expect this is what we would do," he said.

In addition to commercial recycling, Great Forest also: Audits air and water quality, measures toxicity of chemicals, surveys entire office spaces and reviews companies' purchasing practices.

Great Forest's staff of 15 includes

engineers and environmentalists all of whom speak a number of languages. Many have worked on environmental issues on behalf of government or non-profits. All, he said, "have a dogged fierce commitment to environmental issues."

The company has expanded its recycling services to Westchester, Philadelphia, and Washington, D.C.

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