

## **The Greenest Advertising Medium is Grazing on Greener Pastures**

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While most people don't contemplate the carbon footprints of advertising mediums, the billboard industry has long been considered the most environmentally friendly. The out-of-home medium has never used any water or sewer services in its operations and can now tout that it uses recyclable display vinyls. On the other hand consider Google. The search engine advertising giant operates more than one million servers a day. Newspapers are not any better. The energy consumption of running large printing presses and maintaining a fleet of delivery trucks is enormous. According to Markets Initiative, Canada cuts down about 12 million trees to produce 1.1 million metric tons of newspaper. The energy use of television and radio stations is also staggering. Now, let's revisit those billboards. In 2009, the billboard industry converted from using paper and paste materials for displaying its ads and began using Eco-Posters which are made from a recyclable durable, yet lightweight material called polyethylene (PE). The recycled billboard vinyls are used in industrial and consumer products such as: composite decking boards, rail road ties, hand bags, portfolio binders and other useful items.

Fairway Outdoor Advertising is just one of the local billboard companies that began using Eco-Posters in its North Carolina operations. The positive environmental impact of this newly adopted practice is dramatic. Since implementing Eco-Posters as an operational practice, Fairway has eliminated the use and disposal of 2,500 gallons of paste per month. In addition, this change has saved 6,000-8,000 pounds of paper from entering area landfills every year. While freeing-up a vast amount of landfill space alone is dramatic, the trickledown effect of this new product creates additional eco-friendly attributes. Consider the vehicle emissions saved from the elimination of shipping paste as well as the riddance of daily miles driven by Fairway staff to local landfills.

However, the billboard industry is just getting started with new green initiatives, which include wind and solar implementations. Last year, Fairway installed its first solar billboard in Raleigh, N.C. Conversely, solar might just be the tip of the iceberg for green billboards. Fairway has also been conducting wind testing in its coastal markets to see if vertical wind turbines would be a viable option for the industry's environmental goals. The idea for renewable wind energy is that turbines can be placed between the current display faces, which would act as a wind tunnel and not aesthetically detract from the existing appearance of the billboard structure.

Other billboard companies around the country are launching their own renewable energy initiatives. Consider the latest billboard addition in Times Square by Ricoh. The Ricoh billboard is 100 percent powered by advanced solar technology. This patent pending technology utilizes thin film photovoltaic material that billboard companies can incorporate into their billboard structures to harness the sun's energy. These lightweight solar systems could be installed on some of the 450,000 billboards currently in the United

States. Each of these implementations would generate clean renewable energy to either power billboard illumination or it could be sold back to local utility companies through net metering. Likewise, Lamar Outdoor Advertising recently announced a plan to convert approximately 1,300 billboards in Florida to wind or solar power. The Lamar initiative is expected to be a \$12.5 million investment in renewable energy and should be completed by April 2012.

As additional advances in solar and wind generating technology come into the market place, many outdoor advertising industry experts expect more and more billboards to convert to alternative energy. It will be just a matter of time until the greenest advertising medium is fully grazing on green pastures.