Roxul International is a company that makes all kinds of commercial and residential insulation for energy conservation, sound reduction and fire control out of molten rocks. They call it rock wool. They have two plants in Canada serving all of North America.

Roxul is one of those companies that's showing that working to meet environmental targets like the Kyoto accords is not necessarily a financial burden, but can in fact be profitable. That's a radical idea: companies taking care of the environment so they can make more money. There are whole think tanks trying to convince companies that taking care of people and nature is not only the right thing to do but the profitable thing to do -- like the Rocky Mountain Institute at www.rmi.org -- a web site worth the visit.

Follow this for a minute. Roxul insulation is made by taking volcanic rock and melting it, then blowing that molten lava into 'angel hair' and compressing it back into batts. Lava rock is one of the most abundant natural resources on earth. But, it turns out they can also use the slag that floats to the top of the iron ore ovens when steel is made. So they are buying up all the slag they can get, scrap that used to be an ecological disposal problem for iron mills. In fact, while they make the Roxul insulation, they also create a bit of slag that floats to the top of the molten material, and a bit of iron that sinks to the bottom. So they sell the iron to the steel mills, and run their own slag back through their own process.

For a long time the fine sand that came off as they cleaned the lava rock just fell through their sizing machines, and that used to go to the dump. Then they found they could collect all the fine material and make bricks that would be the right size for their own ovens -- so now it goes right back into the process -- leaving almost nothing for the landfill.

They use water to cool the lava melting ovens, and that used to go into the rivers. Hot water into a river is not such a good idea. So now they get all their space heating and even the heat to dry their recycled bricks from the water that is used to cool the ovens. Get the picture? Things go in useful circles, being reused and reused rather than thrown away.

Some pollutants do come out of their smoke stacks, but because of the temperatures they work at and other anti-pollution efforts, this factory is way below the ecological thresholds presently in place. When you add to it the fact that the insulation batts they produce are used to save lots of energy on space heating, the entire lifecycle ecological imprint of this factory is actually way on the positive side.

www.Roxul.com

We often assume that profitable industry and pollution inevitably go hand in hand, but there are real life examples right here in Canada that show it is possible to be ecologically conscious, make good products and be successful.

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