

# Paul Hemsley

Gayle Mavor

## Mr. Clean

Hemmera president Paul Hemsley heads a growing staff of biologists, engineers, community planners, geologists and other specialists in the rapidly expanding environmental consulting sector



DOMINIC SCHAEFER

Look no farther than the recently squashed Upper Pitt River run-of-river project to see what happens when stakeholder resistance derails development plans.

An environmental impact study, which includes accurately assessing the mood of stakeholders, can mean the difference between project approval and rejection.

Paul Hemsley, president of Hemmera, and his staff of biologists, engineers, community planners, geologists and specialists in environmental consulting and contaminated site remediation do everything within their power to ensure that their clients avoid a Pitt River scenario.

Strong local relationships combined with stricter environmental regulations have prompted an unprecedented annual growth spurt at the Vancouver-based company of between 15% and 20% in the last five years. Four years ago, Hemmera's revenue was \$4 million. This year, it's on track to exceed \$10 million.

Hemsley said he's approached once a month or so by companies in Canada, the U.S. and the U.K. with offers to buy Hemmera. But the 44-year-old father of two children aged five and seven has no interest in selling what might be considered his first baby: his company.

"We're a young company. The average age is 34 years old, and my goal is to continue to grow sustainably to 140 or 150 employees by 2010."

Hemmera employs approximately 100 people, which is up from 40 in just five years. It has a satellite office in Victoria and another set to open in Burnaby this month. The 14-year-old company used to split its work evenly

between environmental assessments, consulting and remediation of contaminated sites.

Remediation can include cleaning up buried oil and gas tanks from former gas station in urban areas, historical landfill sites, chemicals that have leached into groundwater where dry-cleaning facilities once were or wood treatment chemicals from defunct sawmills. New genomic technologies such as microarrays are increasingly assisting in the mucky site remediation science.

But a booming economy and aging transportation infrastructure, combined with a push toward renewable energy sources, such as wind farms, all of which require environmental assessments, has tipped Hemmera's original balance to the environmental assessment side of its business.

The projects change, but the thick binders of environmental impact studies remain constant. Documentation must detail how projects meet harmonized provincial and federal environmental assessment acts. The Bear Mountain wind project proposal took a year to prepare and another year to secure approval. It required four seasons of data.

Darrell Dejardin, director of environmental programs for Port Metro Vancouver, called Hemmera the environmental consultancy firm of choice for the Deltaport third berth project. He added that the Deltaport expansion was "the first project at Roberts Bank that didn't actually go through a court challenge."

Dejardin described Hemsley as a "straight shooter who lives by his word, pays attention to detail and really cares about his staff."

The Deltaport assessment even included an acoustic mapping program that was superimposed over the migratory route of southern resident Orcas. It meant assessing the impact on all five species of Pacific salmon and migratory shore birds, such as the Western Sandpiper, interacting with stakeholders, including the local protest group **Against Port Expansion** (APE) and even an MLA taking his constituents' concerns to the House of Commons.

Hemmera sometimes collaborates with Victoria's **Manning Cooper & Associates Ltd.** and Langley's **Robertson Environmental Services** in a sector that has seen many recent consolidations, including **SLR Consulting** of the U.K. buying **Seacor Environmental Ltd.**, **AECOM**, a U.S. firm, taking over **Gartner Lee** and Montreal-based **SNC Lavalin** scooping up Burnaby's **Morrow Environmental**.

"Buying companies equates to buying staff," Hemsley said in referring to the competition for attracting qualified people.

And while larger competitors – **AMEC**, **Jacques Whitford** and **Golder Associates** – might be viewed as threats, Hemsley believes they help drive Hemmera's success.

"Our A-team is local, and that cumulative knowledge helps us beat the second- or third-line staff that clients may have working on their behalf when they hire the larger international firms."

**Sue Foster**, **BC Hydro's** manager of regulatory, environmental, stakeholders and communications, described Hemsley's staff as "professional, superb and with solid experience in the whole environmental as-

**Mission:** To build Hemmera's staff to 150 by 2010

**Assets:** A corporate culture built on integrity and respect and focused on developing and retaining top talent

**Yield:** Recognition as one of the top "go-to" environmental consulting companies in Western Canada

essment field."

Hemsley refers to himself as a generalist, and that includes how he approaches corporate social responsibility. Hemmera is just as likely to host an Earth Day "100-mile diet" potluck as participate in Bowling for Big Brothers' mentoring program.

The young geologist, who still plays hockey three times a week in winter, arrived in the West in 1993. He holds a bachelor of science degree from **Queens University** and an MBA from **Dalhousie**.

In the '80s, he was one of the youngest directors at what is now the **Canadian Environmental Assessment Agency**, where he educated others about the Canadian Environmental Assessment Act. That experience enabled him to recognize how combining his expertise in government process, scientific and technical knowledge and a focus on personalized client service could fill a niche. Those factors still keep the former **BIV** Forty under 40 nominee energized.

He credits Eric Pringle, his current business partner, as being instrumental in Hemmera's growth. Hemsley also reflected on how his father – a veterinarian – set the bar high for four young sons by making integrity and respect priorities.

"I learned by watching him, that running a business is 24/7."

Hemsley was one of "those" kids. He delivered papers. He sold golf balls. He seized opportunities.

As Hemmera delivers on the requisite environmental groundwork for its clients, he now likes to think he's the one "creating opportunities" for other B.C. companies. ■

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