

More businesses here turning to green technology

■ BY AMRESH GUNASINGHAM

THE green movement is making some headway here as more businesses choose cleaner and more efficient ways to house their staff and products.

A check with three big players in the building efficiency sector – dedicated to the provision of energy-efficient technology and services such as the reduction of electricity, water and gas consumption – shows two trends:

■ Revenue and clientele have almost doubled in the last few years, with the bulk of business coming from hotels, shopping centres, office buildings and the manufacturing sector.

■ The number of building owners with a national building efficiency rating has increased more than tenfold since 2005.

This surge in business is luring more into the industry to grab a slice of the sustainability pie.

“From just a handful of players at the turn of the decade, there are up to 30 today,” said Mr Howard Shaw, executive director of the Singapore Environment Council.

Industry experts estimate the market to be worth about \$100 million today.

One firm, Trane, has seen revenue soar by 40 per cent to US\$12 million (S\$17 million) since it opened an energy service division three years ago.

It offers energy-saving solutions such as the retrofitting of cooling ducts and lighting systems in commercial buildings.

“Owners are realising that they can gain significant savings and what is good for their bottom line is also beneficial for the environment,” said Mr Lee Eng Lock, Trane’s technical energy director for Asia energy services.

In 2008, Trane installed \$3.5 million worth of power-saving chiller systems at the Ascendas headquarters at Singapore Science Park in Pasir Panjang.

The project is expected to save about 5,300 megawatt-hours of electricity and reduce carbon emissions by 2,500 tonnes a year. This, in turn, will shave up to \$1 million, or 55 per cent, off the utility bill of Ascendas, a developer and manager of business space.

Mr Vincent Low, business development director at G-Energy Global, which manages about 100 clients, said business is growing at 30 per cent a year, translating into revenue that is 60 per cent higher than that in 2005.

Others are even eyeing markets abroad.

Kaer, among the first such companies set up here, is investing more than \$20 million in opening regional offices in China, India and Australia, said its chief executive, Mr Justin Taylor.

He added that revenue has jumped more than fourfold in the last decade, and is expected to double this year.

The greater push for energy efficiency is a key component of Singapore’s push for sustainability, particularly given the lack of access to viable alternative energy



A worker monitoring chillers on the rooftop of Ascendas' headquarters at the Singapore Science Park. The \$3.5 million power-saving investment, installed in 2008, is expected to help Ascendas shave \$1 million off its yearly utility bill. ST PHOTO: DESMOND LIM

sources such as wind, sun and biofuels.

The industry and building sectors are also the top two energy-guzzling sectors, accounting for nearly three-quarters of national energy consumption here, said the National Environment Agency (NEA).

To enhance professionalism and service quality in the industry, NEA has an accreditation scheme for energy service providers. There are currently 16 companies on board, with more in the pipeline this year.

The introduction of the Green Mark label – a building rating system – by the

Building Construction Authority (BCA) is bringing more on board. The number of buildings with the Green Mark label has soared from 17 in 2005 to more than 200 today.

“The schemes have not only been able to reach out to the major developers, but also generated great interest among smaller ones,” said a BCA spokesman, who added that industrywide attention has had a major impact on getting architects and consultants to “think green”.

BCA is looking to diversify the Green Mark scheme by offering certification

in areas such as infrastructure, office interior and landed housing.

But this is only the tip of the iceberg, said Mr Shaw, adding that while new projects were being designed with efficiency in mind, older buildings were still lagging behind.

Yet, a revolution of sorts is inevitable, believes Mr Taylor.

“We usually change our mobile phones every year, each time expecting to have more functions, more speed, just a better performance overall,” he said. “Why are building systems not subject to the same rule?”