

New Belgium Brewing Turning Wastewater to Cash

by Michael Graham Richard, Gatineau, Canada on 06.26.05



New Belgium Brewing, a brewery located in Fort Collins, Colorado, is using 40% less energy per barrel of output than the average American brewer. How do they do it? By being smart: They are aggressively targeting reduction of energy use through conservation and efficiency and getting the most out of what other less eco-savvy businesses would consider only waste. A \$5 million system collects methane from the brewing wastewater and uses it to fire a 290-kilowatt electric generator. "When the generator is running - typically 10 to 15 hours a day - it supplies up to 60 percent of the brewery's power. New Belgium saves \$2,500 to \$3,000 a month by generating its own electricity. But the system's biggest savings came from avoiding the steep fees that would be assessed by the city of Fort Collins to treat the brewery's nutrient-rich wastewater."

All breweries could potentially do this, and most business could use taking a hard look at what they consider to be "only waste". As Paul Hawken says in *The Ecology of Commerce* (great book, by the way), waste is something that your business produces but that you can't sell. Reducing waste makes as much economic sense as it does from an ecological point of view, and if we are to have a truly sustainable society, we will need to eliminate waste almost entirely like in natural cycles.

Also, in 1999, New Belgium became the first U.S. brewery and one of the first Colorado businesses to buy all its electricity from wind power.

[New Belgium page about their sustainability efforts](#)