

R&D groups join forces

Sarnia's chemical research and development sector has acquired some international-calibre street smarts.

Both the Bioindustrial Innovation Centre and the Sustainable Chemistry Alliance have joined forces with GreenCentre Canada to add a missing piece to the puzzle. The two centre of excellence officially formed a partnership with the centre at Queen's University in Kingston on Aug. 16.

The new affiliation means "green" innovations created at the Modeland Road Research Park will join others from universities across Canada at the Kingston clearinghouse for further development. By the time GreenCentre Canada is finished with a project, seeds planted at the Research Park will have grown into larger scale versions that the Sustainable Chemistry Alliance can farm to industry.

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research bench," said Dr. Murry McLaughlin, executive director of the Bioindustrial Innovation Centre. "The benefit for the Sarnia-Lambton facility is that we can then bring that technology (to Sarnia) and do further development at the pilot

facility so we can run it up to a pilot scale.

"Once we have that, we can then raise money to take it to a demonstration scale. From

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demonstration, it leads to commercialization."

Before the partnership, getting a good idea to the right place was hit or miss, McLaughlin said. It depended, in large part, on the university involved to take ideas to the next level.

Although it didn't come out of the University of Western Ontario's Research Park in Sarnia, there's already one idea in the pipeline that's almost ready to bring to Sarnia to take to the demonstration scale, said Rui Resendes, executive director of Green Centre Canada. Details of how it will happen are still under negotiation.

"Historically, there really hasn't been anything in place," Resendes said. "...It was discovered and then you hoped you were able to shop it around to industrial partners with very little data."

Proving whether or not a discovery has market potential can take anywhere from six months to two years, Resendes said. One of

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the biggest considerations is whether or not the end product will have a "green impact" on the process chain.

As a part of the product development process, GreenCentre Canada also locks down intellectual property rights and builds startup businesses from scratch that can either strike out on their own or be snatched up by a larger firm.

Universities also have a financial kick in the pants to get academic research scientists out from behind their desks and into the lab, Resendes said. One of the Kingston non-profit organization's mandates is to give the institution behind a breakthrough 75% of the take when a product or innovation gets to market.

GreenCentre Canada keeps the other quarter to help bring future discoveries to market.

Eighteen months into its creation, the idea has already raised significant interest in the U.S. There's a possibility the Canadian model could take root south of the border.

"I think it's an exciting time for Canada," Resendes said. "Right now, what we're doing is certainly getting the attention of international organizations. It's not only Canada that has had historically poor performance in bringing ideas or discoveries to the marketplace. It's just about every country in the world. There aren't too many exceptions."

Partners in the project are also hoping it will keep Canadian innovations in Canada. Before the Kingston group was created, European and American businesses were often more than willing to snap up Canadian ideas and lay exclusive claim to them.

— Steve Coleman