

BUSINESS

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P.E.I. company designs first hybrid tugboat

DAVE STEWART
The Guardian

The world's first hybrid tugboat, designed by a P.E.I. engineering company, goes to work on Feb. 6.

Xero Point, a company affiliated with Aspin, Kemp and Associates, has been working with an American company that commissioned a marine propulsion system for a tugboat.

Xero Point, which designs a lot of renewable energy products, started designing the system originally for a sailboat or catamaran, said Jason Aspin, CEO of Aspin, Kemp and Associates.

Engineers from Xero Point, which is based in Stratford, travelled to California last September to test the Eco-Tug's system inside the boat. By December, it was trolling the waters of the Los Angeles harbour.

"It was officially handed over to the port of L.A. last Friday and we're basically doing our final tuning and tweaking of the system there and testing to make sure everything is OK," Aspin said in a cellphone interview from the tugboat.

The boat is a harbour-assist tug, meaning it works within the harbour to help manoeuvre big ships. The tugboat has batteries that allow it to shut down all its diesel engines when it is sitting idle.

When it moves through the harbour, it will require only about one-tenth of its power while the main diesel engines will only run about five per cent of the time.

All of it should reduce the boat's emissions up to 30 per cent.

"Our intent was to develop the technology on one and test it," Aspin said. "The way things are looking now it's going to come out better than we'd anticipated."

The Town of Stratford is taking notice of the growing success story. Aspin is heading back to P.E.I. this week. The town and the provincial government will formally honour the success of Xero Friday morning at town hall.

Aspin said they're officially moving their engineering division to the Island.

"It looks like the return on investment is good enough for these guys that we'll be able to market it to anybody that's got a tug or is wanting to build one. It could keep our shop pretty busy. If we are going to do 10 of these a year it would be huge for our business."

The new technologies don't come cheap. The ports of Los Angeles and Long Beach, Calif., donated \$1 million to the making of the new system, and Aspin, Kemp and Associates contributed another \$1 million in time and labour.

Aspin estimates the Eco-Tug will cost about \$2 million more than a normal tug, jacking the overall price to about \$8 million.

"But if it makes sense financially, if they save money over a three- to five-year period, than I think we could easily do that."



Jason Aspin

30/01/09



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