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Media contact

[Seth Preston](#)

Office: 360-428-1617 ext. 235

Mobile: 360-724-8766

Bellingham Professional Finishes takes top NWCAA honor

The company's work to improve air quality earns Platinum award

BELLINGHAM – Switching [Bellingham Professional Finishes](#) to safe, high-quality finishing and painting products made sense to co-owners Miranda Teel and Nick Haas.

"We know that not only are the (solvent-based) products on the market toxic, they don't hold up over time," Teel said.

They also were concerned about the safety of their workers and customers, so that "just made us feel that we should be committed to seeking out better options," she said.

Their switch to environmentally safe, water-based products dramatically cut the company's air emissions and earned the annual Platinum award for the [Northwest Clean Air Agency's](#) Partners for Clean Air program. The Platinum award is the agency's top honor for work that businesses and organizations do to protect and improve air quality.

The company's spray shop used 232 gallons of waterborne clear-coat products in 2018, which emitted 179.32 pounds of volatile organic compounds. The emissions for a shop that uses lacquer coatings, for the same number of gallons sprayed, would have emitted 1,269.04 pounds of VOCs – a difference of more than 600 percent, the company said in its award application letter.

Bellingham Professional Finishes specializes in wood finishes for higher-end custom homes, mainly new construction. The company also does other work, such as cabinet restoration.

Teel said the 16-person operation began working with NWCAA when it added a spray booth in March 2016. Working with NWCAA helped them see they were emitting products into the environment. They decided to move in another direction when considering their emissions along with the cost of disposing of solvent-based products, expense of protective clothing, and product performance.

"It is no longer the quality of our work alone that sets us apart from others in the painting and wood coatings industry – it is our continued commitment to lower our impact on the environment. In 2019, we will be expanding our efforts within the community to promote the more sustainable products and practices that we have moved to," according to the application letter.

In addition, the company replaced all lighting in its two shops with high-efficiency lights and installed a high-efficiency furnace. They also are using efficient infrared heaters in both shops.

Bellingham Professional Finishes also established a no-idle policy for vehicles, worked to reduce trips, and moving to fuel-efficient vehicles. The company bought a five-passenger van to eliminate multiple two-passenger vans going to a single job site. Another five-passenger van will be purchased to replace an old truck that only gets 10 to 12 miles per gallon.

Partners for Clean Air awards

Northwest Clean Air Agency started presenting its Partners for Clean Air awards annually to businesses and organizations in Island, Skagit, and Whatcom counties in 2010. Three levels are awarded: Platinum, Gold, and Silver. This year, a total of 54 emissions sources registered with NWCAA received awards.

The agency selects the Platinum winner as the stand-out business among the Gold award winners. Bellingham Professional Finishes co-owners Miranda Teel and Nick Haas received a plaque and recognition at the NWCAA board of directors meeting on March 14.

To win Gold, businesses must comply with all applicable air quality regulations for at least three years and employ additional clean air practices in at least two of these categories: energy efficiency; emissions reductions; air pollution prevention practices related to their specific business sector; and transportation, such as reducing commute trips, having no-idling policies and switching to cleaner vehicle fleets.

Details about this year's Gold winners' clean air efforts are available on the NWCAA [business recognition web page](#). A list of Silver award winners is also available on that page.

The Northwest Clean Air Agency is responsible for enforcing federal, state and local air quality regulations in Island, Skagit, and Whatcom counties. In addition to permitting and regulating industrial sources of air pollution, the agency provides services and information related to asbestos, indoor air quality, outdoor burning, wood stoves, and fireplaces. More information about the agency is available at www.nwcleanairwa.gov.