

Multi-Disciplinary Environmental Consulting, Auditing and Scientific Services



Scott Freiburger
Managing Director & CEO

About AET Group Inc.

AET Group is an environmental consultancy firm committed to our ecological, financial and social responsibilities, working together collaboratively to find innovative solutions that work and remembering that underneath it all, we're human beings working with other human beings to make a difference both locally and globally.

AET Group is an employee-owned multi-disciplinary environmental consulting, auditing and scientific services company providing professional services to the built and natural environments in the following core service areas: Solid Waste Management, Environmental Compliance, Environmental Audits, Natural Sciences, GHG & Sustainability, Air Quality & Climate Change, Environmental Remediation & Monitoring, Water Resources, Energy & Utilities, and Building Sciences. With over 1,000 projects completed across Canada, AET offers extensive experience, capabilities and a proven track record that, among other benefits, assures that our clients receive value-added services, credible results and effective solutions.

We understand that each project undertaken requires a unique integrated approach and attention to project details to ensure that client's needs are not only met, but also exceeded. Our diverse experience working with clients in many industries and sectors allows us to provide services and expertise specifically tailored to each project's unique requirements.

Our services are used to create a sustainable built and natural environment that protects the water we drink, the air we breathe and the earth in which we live. Our multi-disciplinary approach and application of innovative and environmentally sound solutions enables any size and type of organization, both locally and globally, accomplish their project objectives or resolve their environmental issues effectively and efficiently.

Interview conducted by: Lynn Fosse, Senior Editor, CEOCFO Magazine

CEOCFO: Mr. Freiburger, what was the vision when AET Group was started? Where are you today?

Mr. Freiburger: I started the company about sixteen years ago as a university graduate. The vision really stemmed from seeing a niche in the marketplace, focusing primarily in the construction industry with a strong focus on solid waste management. Having grown up in that industry, as my father was a builder and his father was a builder, I observed a lot of waste materials ending up in a dumpster and off to the landfill it would go. A number of the materials were unused, over purchased materials. Knowing that there was an opportunity to improve the current process for managing the wastes, Associated Environmental Technologies (AET) was born. We started developing solid waste management programs to help construction contractors minimize the amount of waste that they generate throughout a project and designed source separation programs on site, where all materials could be managed and source separated for reuse and recycling. These materials are not seen as waste, but rather a resource that could end up being reused or recycled back into the marketplace. That was essentially how the company started. The company has grown from being a consulting company focused primarily in solid waste management in the construction industry, to being a sought-after, multi disciplinary environmental consulting, auditing and scientific services company offering 10 core services across Canada and into the United States.

CEOCFO: What are some of the more common services that you provide and what might be a little more outside the box?

Mr. Freiburger: Obviously, solid waste management is still one of our large service areas where we have extensive expertise and are technically, one of the leading companies in Canada. We now extend to do everything from air quality and climate change to building sciences, energy, environmental auditing, regulatory compliance, environmental remediation and monitoring, natural sciences, water resources and sustainability. Those are our basic core services that we have expanded into over the last decade and continue to build on. Much of it was driven by clients that wanted to deal with us based on our reputation and trust we have established over the years. We began to branch out into a lot of areas and bring on people that had expertise. We also did some mergers and acquisitions along the way, which helped us to become leaders in the service areas that we currently offer.

CEOCFO: *Would you walk us through a typical project? When might a company come to you and what are the steps?*

Mr. Freiburger: A company can come to us in a number of different ways. Every client's situation is unique. We are excellent listeners and pay strict attention to the client's issues and needs to provide them with a superior service rather than tell them what we think they should hear. There is no one real standard approach to a company coming to us and needing services. It could be everything from a regulatory compliance requirement where they have government reporting requirements that they have to meet, so they would come to us to assist them with their government reporting. Or it could be a ground water or indoor air contamination issue, similar to a project that we are currently managing and monitoring for nearly a decade. From our experience, there seems to be no real typical way in which a company would come to us. We also do a lot of bidding on tenders and proposal writing. This is a result of nearly seventy percent of our business being government work; everything from the federal, provincial, regional and municipal governments. The majority of this work is generated through a bidding process. We do, however, get different levels of the government come directly to us for a particular service, based on our expertise and reputation. Government's hands are usually tied as a result of purchasing by laws that requires them to go through a competitive bidding process for projects. Governments that do approach us directly for a particular project feel that there is expertise and the technical capabilities to complete and deliver the project efficiently and effectively.

“We are a company that is based on a number of philosophies: integrity, excellence, respect, sustainable and solutions. At the end of the day, it does not matter what type of business you are in, it is people working with people. Service trumps sales. We are a people organization. We are considered to be partners with whoever we work with. It is not like a company - client relationship. It is more of a partnership, where we are your trusted partner guiding you from vision to implementation, to reveal and achieve your sustainable possibilities.” - Scott Freiburger

CEOCFO: *What are some of the challenges in working with the various levels of government?*

Mr. Freiburger: I wouldn't use the word “challenge” but rather there are obstacles with working with various levels of government from red tape to reporting requirements to multiple sign-offs for certain projects. Working with the various levels of government is more seen as an opportunity than a challenge. The US government is an area that we have just started to get into. We are a Canadian based company. All of the work that we do has been focused across Canada. We were recently awarded a contract for a waste study in six states. We are looking forward to this opportunity to expand our services into the United States.

CEOCFO: *Most of your work is in Canada, where often different provinces have very different sets of rules. Challenges?*

Mr. Freiburger: This is a challenge not only when dealing with different provinces across Canada, but any company or organization. Different provinces have unique regulations and legislation. They often have the same issues and challenges, so it is important to understand their specific requirements, knowing what you want your end product to be at the end of the day and spelling that out in the scope of work or the terms of reference. Often times we have to work with them to help them get to the end result. Sometimes, when you do your initial project kick-off meeting, what they anticipated as the result is different than what the actual result is going to be. Therefore, you have to work with them to fine tune the terms of reference in order to come to the outcome that they would like. Sometimes this becomes a challenge because what you were anticipating and priced now may need to be adjusted.

CEOCFO: *On your website it states, “We are human beings working with other human beings.” How does that translate day to day? What does that mean in your interactions?*

Mr. Freiburger: We are a company that is based on a number of philosophies: integrity, excellence, respect, sustainable and solutions. At the end of the day, it does not matter what type of business you are in, it is people working with people. Service trumps sales. We are a people organization. We are considered to be partners with whoever we work with. It is not like a company - client relationship. It is more of a partnership, where we are your trusted partner guiding you from vision to implementation, to reveal and achieve your sustainable possibilities. Rather than go in and consult with them and tell them what they need, we listen. We listen to their issues and challenges including what they require and help define a process to get them the end result they need. In our company, we are big on sustainability. Often times you hear this buzz word “being green and being sustainable”. “Sustainable” is more than just the environment. It takes into consideration all of your social and economic responsibilities as well as your environmental. Therefore, within our organization it is something that we not only preach but rather something we practice on a day to day basis and are constantly striving to be more corporately and socially responsible within the organizations and the communities that we work in. We have done this through a number of initiatives that drives the sustainability movement through our own employees, all the way across to the organizations that we are currently working with.

CEOCFO: *Would you tell us about the Plant a Tree project?*

Mr. Freiburger: Project Plant a Tree is a unique initiative that I developed. The whole purpose for this was for finding a way that we could give back to the communities in which we work, because most people do not fully understand the true value of trees and how valuable they are. There is deforestation happening all over the world. I am a big believer of no net loss, meaning for every tree you take down, you plant two or more in return. The whole program was really a way that we could give back to the communities in which we work with and support our commitment to reduce our carbon footprint and our GHG emissions by forty percent over the next ten years through Sustainable Waterloo Regional Carbon Initiative. One to two percent of our annual profits go towards the Project Plant a Tree program to help support numerous community initiatives. This year we partnered with the City of Kitchener to launch the program, which is the city in which our head office is located. We partnered with the City for Earth Day and provided the tree plantings and volunteers that went out and helped plant trees in the local community. It was a way that we were able to give back and help create a tree canopy that will help with carbon sequestration and numerous other ecological benefits. Not only do trees absorb greenhouse gas emissions, but they also improve air quality, recycle water, create shade, and provide food and homes for living things across the planet. The simple act of planting trees helps sustain our communities and the environment in countless ways.

CEOCFO: *Very often after a plant puts in a new system and seems to be much more efficient, after a few years, it turns out that the machinery is using more energy than they are saving. How do you follow through on maybe some of the unintended consequences, some of the changes in thought in the environmental industry?*

Mr. Freiburger: The environment is an ever evolving industry. Everything from climate change to waste and landfill space to drinking water quality. Even if you were to go back ten years ago, everything has evolved tremendously and there are more pressures on our planet from industry and our growing global population. At the end of the day, the amount of clean, safe drinking water that we have on the earth is here. We cannot create any more of it. It is either caught up in the atmosphere or in the ground water, aquifers or fresh water lakes. Sometimes people do not understand that and think they can turn on the tap and clean water will always be there. This is not necessarily the case. Obviously, with growing populations come more waste and more added stress on our precious resources and the planet. Therefore, you have to be on the cutting edge and forecast and plan ahead. We try to plan twenty or thirty years ahead when we work with some organizations to determine what it is going to look like, where we are heading and what paths we are moving towards. To say that there is one real true method or process is not the case, but we are always on the forefront and always looking ahead of the curve, anticipating the next evolution that could potentially impact the environment. Knowing that the environment is in a fragile state and it will defend itself just like anyone else would when it is attacked, we really need to be more considerate when we are looking at certain products that we are producing, which now brings us to a whole different area within our company in terms of purchasing policies and green procurement. Where many products are manufactured, they do not have strict and enforced environmental laws. Everything impacts us. It does not matter where it is manufactured; it impacts us all one way or another. Air pollution does not stay in one place. It moves. It travels. These are things that, as consumers, need to be educated. We help to educate people and make them more aware of what the actual impact is, not only today, but for future generations, and what sort of steps we can take to help prevent environmental damage and make a more sustainable future.

CEOCFO: *Are there particular types of projects that you personally prefer to work on?*

Mr. Freiburger: My areas of expertise are on third party verification auditing. There are so many different types of auditing that I get involved in from regulatory compliance to management systems to drinking water quality and GHG. The audits typically involve reviewing and verifying a number of policies and procedures or data through more of an objective lens. The third party verification audits help an organization who might be claiming that their product is environmentally friendly or they are reducing and diverting X number of tonnes of waste or they have reduced their GHG emissions by X number of tonnes of CO₂. I enjoy the auditing process; helping organizations be transparent and helping support their claim. This is critical when you have organizations saying and making claims about what their company is doing and what their products may be doing.

CEOCFO: *You mentioned a project in the United States. Is there a deliberate push now or a deliberate effort to widen your geographic area or is it more opportunistic?*

Mr. Freiburger: We have always looked to expand our operations across North America and into the US. Therefore, I think this is going to help now give us a foothold where we can start to look to expand more across the US marketplace. I think we have much to offer the US in terms of our expertise in what we do and many of our capabilities that they can utilize. Therefore, it is a way that we are going to look to broaden ourselves across the US.

CEOCFO: *Business is going well as you were recognized in the Profit 500. Have you always been an employee owned organization? When did that make sense for you?*

Mr. Freiburger: This truly made sense right from the beginning. I believe that you are only as good as the people beside you. I am fortunate to have the support of an amazing team of individuals who share in my passion and values of what I see for the company. Employee-owned enables us to provide a sense of ownership for our employees and to share directly in all the accomplishments our company achieves. Having never really worked for anyone other than myself, I get

it. I have always had that sort of entrepreneurial spirit within me and being employee-owned has helped bring out the entrepreneurial spirit of our employees. I think it was in my DNA, in terms of being an entrepreneur, finding what the market needs and where I can utilize my expertise and start to develop products and services. Still today, even though we have been doing this for sixteen years, we are still looking for where we can continue to find new business opportunities and continue to expand. Having that entrepreneurial spirit has enabled us to do that.

CEO/COO: *What would you say to people who think sustainability and concerns about the environment are much ado about nothing? For people who do not think they need to pay attention, what would you tell them?*

Mr. Freiburger: I would say to stop living in a bubble. Those are the types of people who take a lot for granted; the fact that they can turn the tap on and have clean drinking water, that they can go outside and breathe clean air. The fact remains that the environment is changing; climate change is happening around us, whether it is manmade, natural or a combination of the two, it is affecting us. For people who think that we do not need to pay attention, they need to realize that at the end of the day we cannot take for granted that we all live on this earth and we have to treat the earth the same way that we want to be treated when they come into our home. Earth is providing a home for us all. To a degree, they need to understand that if we continue to go down the same path that we have, at some point we are not going to be able to turn the tap on and have clean drinking water. We will not be able to go outside without having to wear a mask because the smog is so bad. To some, it has to come to this before it becomes a wakeup call. Sometimes people need to tune in. It does not take much to see in the news and to follow many of the studies that have been taking place, especially in the arctic with the decline of the ice caps and depletion of the glaciers. As professionals and experts, we all need to do a better job educating people about the issues. In some cases, we are not giving them the information that they need and in some instances they are not asking the right questions or getting the information that they need in order to make an educated decision on their habits and how they are going to contribute to a sustainable future. Nonetheless, we all have a role to play in a sustainable future, to make sure that the general public, industry and organizations are educated and made aware about how our decisions and habits can impact the environment.

BIO: Scott Freiburger is Managing Director and CEO at AET Group Inc. (AET). As the founding principal of AET, Scott pioneered the development, implementation and monitoring of solid waste management programs for the construction and IC&I industries. The programs were designed to put industry in compliance with regulations, reduce waste generation and increase waste diversion. Since 1998, Scott has positioned AET as a leading and sought after multi-disciplinary environmental consulting, auditing and scientific services company.

Scott has over 17 years of experience in environmental consulting and auditing, providing technical advice and senior management including first-hand expertise in municipal solid waste management, regulatory compliance, drinking water systems, management systems and public consultation. He has contributed to the environmental field through numerous publications including articles, technical papers, presentations and speaking engagements.

Scott has provided technical advice and senior consultation on 1,000 environmental studies including first-hand expertise in solid waste and drinking water quality for numerous municipalities across Canada, accreditation and certification audits for various standards and programs, GHG inventories and verifications, energy assessments and regulatory compliance for both the public and private industry. His strong analytical skills, environmental science background and broad range of environmental consulting and auditing experience combine to provide a solid foundation for the development and measuring of environmental indicators.

Scott is a graduate of Environmental Studies from the University of Waterloo and has a diploma in Environmental Engineering from Conestoga College. Scott is an Applied Science Technologist, a Certified Environmental Auditor, a Certified Energy Advisor, a Certified Environmental Professional and a Certified Environmental Management System Lead Auditor. He also is a LEED Accredited Professional with the Canada Green Building Council and a Certified Facilitator.

Scott is a results-oriented individual with a passion for developing and fostering positive environmental change. He believes in giving back. Outside of his professional life, Scott enjoys teaching his 3 children about the natural environment and participating in many outdoor recreational activities including mountain biking, hiking, rock climbing, golf and scuba diving.

AET Group Inc.
531 Wellington Street North
Kitchener, Ontario
Canada N2H 5L6
519-576-9723 or 877-876-9235
www.aet98.com