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Michigan oil spill should be a call to action for renewable energy



By Jerry Powers

The blowback from our dangerous dependence on oil is now hitting home for us in Michigan, a million gallons of oil flooded into the Kalamazoo River recently.

One of the worst environmental disasters in the Midwest has now hit us in our own backyard and endangered one of the great rivers in Michigan, a river renowned for fly-fishing and other sport fishing, a river that is a haven for canoeists and kayakers, a river that provides jobs, opportunity and a good quality of life for countless families.

As a family-owned business that has served the metro Detroit area since 1939, Powers Distributing understands how important it is to leave Michigan strong for future generations to enjoy. The oil catastrophes in the Gulf and closer to home in Michigan are wake-up calls for all of us to work even harder to reduce our addiction to oil. Businesses can invest in renewable fuels; families can take easy steps to increase energy efficiency in their homes.

Beginning in 2008, Powers revamped our truck fleet and changed the way we deliver our beverages to local stores, bars and restaurants and other businesses. We began by converting three dozen trucks and switched from diesel to a bio-fuel blend that reduces our use of fossil fuels. We increased our investments in clean vehicles in 2009, by launching a new fleet of 15 trucks and five tractors that are bio-fuel-electric hybrids.

With the new hybrid trucks, Powers expects to slash fossil fuel use by more than 25%, or 12,500 gallons each year. With the bio-fuel hybrid tractors, we will reduce fuel use by more than 20%, or about 6,000 gallons less fuel, and cut greenhouse gas emissions by at least 30%.

We're just one Michigan business that is moving toward a clean energy future. We invite everyone – businesses, families and government – to invest in more clean energy technologies and build a stronger Michigan together.

Jerry Powers is president of Powers Distributing in Orion Township.