



# TIME

NATION

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## The Greening of Chicago

**Mayor Richard Daley wants to turn the City of Big Shoulders into the most environmentally friendly city in the U.S., and he's not just blowing hot air**

By ERIC FERKENHOFF/CHICAGO

Chicago, a blue-collar city of asphalt and glass and concrete canyons, would seem an odd place for admitted tree-hugger Sadhu Johnston to think he could save the planet. But Johnston, Mayor Richard M. Daley's environmental commissioner, believes that cities are actually the answer to the earth's environmental ills. And with that in mind, he is working to turn Chicago into what he claims will be the most environmentally friendly city in the U.S. — as well as the nation's center for environmental design and the manufacturing of components for the production of alternative energy.

If it works — and Daley is betting a hefty sum it will, with promises to buy millions in solar panels, for example — the green movement here is expected to yield the city perhaps billions in saved energy costs and new business. "This is way beyond tree hugging in Chicago," said Johnston, 31, who before coming to Chicago helped dust some of the rust off of Cleveland's image by serving as executive director of the non-profit Cleveland Green Building Coalition. "This is about quality of life. What we're talking about is creating a city that exists in harmony with the world, a place that can be a model. Cities have long been hurtful to the environment. Raw materials came in and waste went out. We're trying to redefine that relationship, and cities can be models."

In much the same way that cities like Austin and San Francisco latched onto the boom in the Internet or biotech industry to propel their economies, Chicago is working hard to rev up its manufacturing and capitalize on the growth in green construction and wind and solar energies. But can Chicago, such a muscular city, shake its industrial, broad-shouldered image by showing that cities are not the bane of the environment. Does it deserve, in short, the title of America's Green Thumb?

"We're doing it," Daley said in a brief interview earlier this week while also playing host to an environmental summit for U.S. mayors and making a pitch for the 2016 Olympics. "We're aggressive in terms of the environment and we're educating the people and bringing business along."

The city first drew real attention to its greening efforts, when it planted a lush garden on the rooftop of City Hall. Now, be it McDonald's, Wal-Mart or the Apple store, businesses wanting a relaxation of density building rules

or financing to help construct new offices are being convinced to plant so-called green roofs. The result: the city has planted or negotiated the construction of over 2 million square feet of rooftop gardens, more than all other U.S. cities combined.

While in office Daley, who shut down the lakefront airport Meigs Field in a bald power play to create a big park, has ordered that the heads of all city departments make their operations environmentally friendly. That includes paving alleys with special asphalt to better absorb water, buying a greener fleet of vehicles or forbidding city vehicles to idle more than five minutes.

Chicago is now among the largest users of green energy in the country, with a goal of using renewable energy for roughly a quarter of city operations. To help reach that goal, it has already attracted two solar panel manufacturers to set up shop in the area.

The Windy City, which has won international awards for its environmental agenda, also boasts one of the world's only municipal buildings given a platinum rating for its green design and operations by the organization Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design. That honor is more than a little ironic, since the building, the Center for Green Technology, sits on a former illegal dump that was part of a sweeping federal investigation that sent several aldermen to jail for taking bribes.

Since Daley, a Democrat whose administration is mired in a sweeping federal investigation into hiring practices and patronage schemes, took office in 1989, some 500,000 trees have been planted, the city has been decorated with fancy planters, park space has increased and the lakefront, while still soiled with pollution, is being cleaned and preserved at a level never before seen.

"Look at this," Daley said, motioning to a wide yard in the depressed Dearborn Homes public housing development. To be sure, the neighborhood, among the city's poorest, isn't much to brag about. But it is green. Trees have been planted, the lawns have been tidied and are lush, despite the broken concrete and glass that litters nearby playgrounds. "This wouldn't have happened before."

But not all is so green here. A broad recycling program in the city, which was touted as a model for urban America a decade ago, has not yielded the expected results, as some 87% of the city's total refuse is still not being fully recycled. And the air quality, while improved, remains a sore topic.

Still, the city's efforts are drawing attention. Green Bay Mayor James Schmitt, who launched his Greener Green Bay campaign during his recent State of the City speech, is sold and makes no apologies for trying to copy Chicago. "We're a blue-collar, paper-making, NFL football town," he says. "We're very young in this, and we're going to use Chicago as a model."