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Portland's 45th Ave. Cleaners is recognized for its Earth-friendly habits of recycling and cleaning with fewer chemicals.

Brian Olson takes the hangers customers bring to his cleaning business by the hundreds and picks the cardboard off by hand so it can be recycled.

He has purchased wet cleaning machines that use biodegradable materials other machines can't. And everywhere there is a trash can, there is a recycling bin.

Dry cleaners use so much plastic and chemicals that they face challenges in trying to be environmentally conscious. So Olson had to get creative and go to great lengths to run an Earth-conscious operation. Two national environmental organizations have noticed.

This week, 45th Ave. Cleaners received the Environmental Protection Agency's Evergreen Award for Pollution Prevention.

It is one of about five businesses in the Northwest to receive the award, and the first dry cleaner to earn the distinction. Also this week, the National Waste Prevention Coalition included Olson's operation in its list of the nation's 15 model cleaners.

Olson's operation is one of 1,121 dry cleaners across the country—only five are in Oregon—that have been dubbed Certified Environmental Drycleaners by the International Fabricare Institute. 45th Ave. Cleaners is the only shop in Portland to win the certification.

Olson was singled out for going beyond the plastic bag and hanger recycling of many dry cleaners.

His environmental methods have brought in additional customers, but Olson says that is not his primary motivation.

"It's not the dollars saved issue," said Olson, who purchased the dry cleaner in 1991. "I'm

coming from just being socially responsible."

Sometimes, responsibility and profitability intersect.

He uses pant hangers that can be recycled on the spot, instead of being torn apart and taken to a recycling plant. The system has reduced hanger purchases by 40 percent over the past few years.

He also has cut his consumption of environmentally unfriendly dry cleaning chemicals by 80 percent since 1996. He used to buy nearly 20 gallons of solvent at 27\$ each a month. He hasn't bought one in 14 months.

Bill Fisher, chief executive of the International Fabricare Institute, in Silver Spring, Md., points out that some environmental efforts can cut into profits. New dry cleaning machines reduce solvent costs by about \$7,000 a year, but cost \$35,000 to \$60,000.

Olson would not give specific revenue information about his business, but classified it

as a small and profitable for the past year. The business dry-cleaned about 12 tons of clothing last year.

Olson said he doesn't know what percentage of his customers come to him because of his environmentally friendly practices. But he says people tell him frequently that is the reason they bring their clothes to his shop.

Lynn Blum, a Multnomah County resident, hasn't used Olson's dry cleaner business but learned about it when she used an alterations service in Olson's building. Blum said she noticed that it didn't smell like most dry cleaners because Olson has reduced his use of cleaning fluid.

"It might be well worth a try," Blum said. "The environmental issue would make a difference for me."