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New Mexico is green behind the screen State adopts 'leave no footprint' filming

By Iain Blair

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New Mexico has aggressively pursued a green filmmaking program that promotes everything from the use of nontoxic paints to leasing hybrid/electric vehicles, while the local union and local vendors have gone even further, innovating ways to recycle and championing the state's "leave no footprint" approach.

"We started the whole idea of green filmmaking, as it's all about the environment here," reports Jon Hendry, business agent for IATSE Local 480 and co-author of "Green Filmmaking," which is being distributed in local high schools. "The truth is filmmaking used to be a very dirty business. There'd be enormous waste and little concern about the community or environment after the production moved on. Now we're teaching the next generation of filmmakers, as well as visiting crews, that we can no longer afford to waste any resource or trash the environment like we used to."

Hendry, who's seen "a huge growth" in green awareness over the past two years, cites several recent success stories.

"When *Crash* got canceled due to Dennis Hopper's untimely death, instead of bulldozing and trashing everything as usual, we recycled all the sets and sent them to the Santa Ana pueblo – one of the poorest places in America – to use as building materials," he explains. "All the wardrobe was donated to homeless shelters and nonprofits. Nothing was wasted, and Lionsgate was totally behind doing this."

Along the same lines, the union worked with Alcon Entertainment to recycle all the flats from the post-apocalyptic actioner *Book of Eli*, which shot near the struggling town of Carizoso. "We re-sized them, and the town

used them for this mile-long art project, which helped revive the town's economy," Hendry says. "Now they have new businesses, restaurants and visitors, and you can see the practical results of the green approach."

Several New Mexico facilities also are going green. Albuquerque Studios was designed with rainwater collection, solar power and chilled-water cooling systems, though the stages have taken heat from some for not being more aggressive in pushing for 21st-century practices. Upstate at the future site of **Santa Fe Studios**, its competition is making environmentally friendly design a cornerstone of its agenda.

"As far as we know, **Santa Fe Studios** will be the world's first LEED (Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design)-designed, industry-standard film studio facility," reports **Santa Fe Studios** president Jason Hool. "The U.S. Green Building Council is adapting its standards for the unique environment of film studios; they are literally writing the rule book for our project."

The way Hendry sees it, green filmmaking is "definitely the future, especially in New Mexico where people are very aware of the environment and the need to be a self-sustaining community. We used to just throw toxic paint down drains and trash sets without even thinking, but that's all changed."

And it'll keep changing, he stresses. "We're way past recycling here. Composting everything's the real future."

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news@variety.com

