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CLEAN ENERGY DEVELOPMENTS SPRINGING UP IN AMERICAN MIDWEST

## Birmingham company blows into U.S. wind farm industry

BY LAUREN B. COOPER | STAFF

A local engineering firm is carving out a niche in the wind farm development industry in the Midwest, building on the increased demand for alternative energy.

Birmingham-based Building & Earth Sciences Inc., a geotechnical, environmental and materials engineering firm, said it's wrapping up work on the first phase of a \$240 million wind farm project in Iowa, which will produce electricity for more than 50,000 homes when completed, said Matt Adams, business development manager for the firm.

And as work on the project winds down, the company will begin materials testing on another large wind farm in the Midwest for the same developer. It also is being considered for future renewable energy developments, he said.

Building & Earth, which is led by President Deepa Bhate, currently is providing materials testing and inspection services for 121 wind turbine foundations and roads in the first phase of the Whispering Willow wind farm, developed by Interstate Power and Light Corp. of Wisconsin. Interstate Power and Light announced in 2007 a long-term investment of \$1.3 billion in energy infrastructure over seven years.

Construction on Whispering Willow, he said, has included some 24-hour days for the fast-tracked project and work in temperatures below zero for Building & Earth's 10 associates on the job. The wind farm is expected to be complete this fall.

Adams said the company has had offices in Oklahoma and Arkansas for several years to serve projects in the Midwest. But when commercial construction work everywhere started shrinking two years ago, the company had to branch out.

It soon found itself – through relationships it had with other firms – in renewable energy and wind farms, an unlikely place for an Alabama company, he said.

But, lately, it's not so unlikely, said Jay Reed, president of Associated Builders and



**Building & Earth Sciences tests the materials used to support the massive wind turbines.**

Contractors of Alabama.

"The professionalism and size of the commercial construction industry and architectural community (in Alabama) does position us to be a recognized state in leading the environmental initiative," he said. "It's not so much our state will look the greenest, but we will have the contractors and architects that can do it effectively to get green done."

Companies everywhere are working to get qualified and educated in green building because that's one of the only sectors showing growth in construction volume over the next five years, he said.

And proposed federal mandates such as the American Clean Energy and Security

Act, stimulus money and state incentives fuel that desire, too.

According to the American Wind Energy Association's second quarter 2009 report, Iowa has the second largest number of wind project installations in the country, behind Texas and ahead of California.

At the end of the quarter, there were 57 wind power projects under construction, which would deliver about 5,000 megawatts of new wind capacity and are expected to be complete in 2009 and 2010.

Also in the quarter, 1,210 megawatts of wind capacity were installed in the U.S. or enough to power about 350,000 homes.

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**The blades on a wind turbine, such as this one in Iowa, are about 85 feet long.**