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ONLINE ARTICLE:

EPA honors Boulder firms

27 companies are recognized for efforts on behalf of commuters

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Twenty-seven Boulder organizations have landed on the 2004 U.S. Environmental Protection Agency's "Best Workplaces for Commuters" list, which recognizes employers who promote alternatives to the daily commute.

The national program began in 2001 as the less-snappy "Commuter Choice Leadership Initiative" and was renamed last year, said Robin Snyder, the EPA program manager for the Best Workplaces for Commuters program. The program seeks to address limited parking, reduce traffic congestion, improve employee recruiting and retention, and minimize the environmental impacts associated with drive-alone commuting, program officials say.

"We'd like to see to it that commuter benefits are the new employee benefits across the country, akin to a 401K," Snyder said.

In Colorado, the list includes 151 companies with about 90,000 employees. Nationwide, employers with 1.6 million employees have been recognized. Among the Boulder organizations recognized are the city of Boulder, the University of Colorado at Boulder, IBM, the U.S. Department of Commerce's Boulder labs and Roche Colorado.

To qualify, organizations must offer a major commuter benefit such as a monthly transit pass subsidy or a significant telecommuting program. Access to a guaranteed ride home program also is required. In addition, employers must offer at least three "supporting" commuter benefits such as carpool incentives, lockers or showers for bikers or walkers, and on-site amenities such as a day care or dry cleaning.

IBM Boulder spokesman Ray Blomgren counted discount bus passes, flex time, employee showers and lockers, and an in-house ride-share program among the company's alternative-commute-related offerings. He said 9 percent of employees telecommute and a total of 14 percent (including telecommuters) use some form of alternative transportation.

Roche Colorado does much of the same, in addition to offering employees free Regional Transportation District Eco Passes, said spokesman John Tayer.

Tayer said offering commuting options was good for the environment as well as a recruiting tool. You don't have to be big to be recognized, though. Boulder's Micro Analysis & Design has 85 employees and made the list. They offer Eco Passes, flex time and shower facilities, among other things.

"Our president, Ron Laughery, rides his bike to work," said Steven Peters, a software engineer at the company.

For more information or to apply to the program, visit www.bwc.gov.

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