



Teaching an old company green tricks

by Alan Gunderson

Package Containers Inc.

I decided that the saying “you can’t teach an old dog new tricks” doesn’t always apply.

The company I work for, Package Containers Inc. of Canby, is a 63-year-old manufacturing company that makes paper bags and wire ties for the grocery, restaurant, bakery and winery markets. I spent the last five years building our internal recycling program. We went from one 30-yard container load of trash per week to just one container a month. We generated additional revenue by selling and recycling a variety of our manufacturing bi-products.

If a traditional manufacturing company like ours can do it, any company can.

It started as a quest to cut cost. In 2005, management sought to lower waste disposal costs through recycling programs for scrap materials and bi-products associated with our manufacturing activities.

Through the City of Portland’s Bureau of Planning and Sustainability, I received the master recycler certification. I led an assessment of our production and waste disposal practices involving both solid and liquid waste. This included monitoring material workflow, resulting in placement of scrap bins and compactors in areas closer to production machinery, thereby increasing efficiency and productivity by reducing transport time. While we had always weighed scrap waste as part of each completed job analysis, we now began to require this scrap be sorted into clearly marked bins that were emptied regularly, compacted and taken to a predetermined area for pick-up by specialty recyclers.

For PCI, these scrap pick-ups now happen at least quarterly as we collect and recycle over 40 bales of compressed paper (resulting in over 50,000 lbs. of recycled paper waste) per load. In addition, 12 large corrugated boxes — or more — of baled plastic, paper roll cores and poly shrinkwrap are added to our quarterly recycling totals. Proceeds from this recycling are reinvested in more recycling equipment such as additional compactors. Smaller items such as glass, metal or plastic bottles, printer ink cartridges, batteries and used office paper have their own bins in our in-house “Recycling Center,” a brightly painted, well-marked corner of the factory floor. These items are collected and delivered to recycling specialists by employees. We also encourage our employees and staff to bring difficult-to-recycle items from home.



Alan Gunderson is art director and special sales manager Package Containers Inc. He’s also a certified master recycler.

We also addressed our plant’s wastewater disposal. As a “green” alternative to capturing and filtering water contaminants, we changed from alcohol-based inks to environmentally friendly water-soluble inks and glues that are easily filtered by our water filtration system. Our next step will be to add a water recycling system that allows us to reuse the filtered water in our production process and reduce our total water consumption.

We also have applied reuse and recycling principles to our wood shipping pallets. We have reduced our wood pallet purchases by reusing incoming pallets for outgoing loads, saving between \$4 and \$11 per pallet in shipping expense.

As the company advocate for sustainable practices, I believe identifying and implementing green practices requires continuing education of both employees and management, but the effort pays off by saving valuable resources. I maintain a bulletin board with current information, recycling class schedules, tips and new ideas to educate workers.

Future sustainability efforts include composting grass cuttings and landscape debris on our 4.26-acre campus as well as working with other Canby businesses to push for solar panel rebates through the Canby PUD, which are currently only available to Portland General Electric customers.

There are lots of tricks your company can do today to increase your sustainability tomorrow — just ask this old green dog.