

# Streamlining green

*Sustainability projects aim to impact manufacturers' bottom line* By Rich Redman

Small and mid-sized companies often face challenges trying to introduce sustainable practices, so the Wisconsin Manufacturing Extension Partnership has launched a 12-month demonstration project to help such companies achieve their green goals.

In Northeast Wisconsin, 11 companies have signed on to WMEP's Profitable Sustainability Initiative, launched in April 2010. Statewide, 45 companies are participating.

The program is funded by a \$1.75 million grant from the Wisconsin Department of Commerce and the State Energy Program. "This initiative had its genesis in the Next Generation Manufacturing Survey that was sponsored by WMEP back in 2008," says Mike Klonsinski, who was executive director of WMEP and the catalyst behind PSI before he was named deputy director of the state Commerce Department in January.

"It was clear from the results that, while leaders of small-to medium-sized businesses felt that sustainability was important, efforts to do anything about it were typically seen as a low priority," Klonsinski adds. "Our goal was to create a broad group of pilot projects that would impact the company bottom line and show that the return is worth the investment."

Whitefield Industrial Coatings, an industrial, commercial and defense coater that employs 75 in Green Bay and Oshkosh, jumped at the chance to be involved.

"Not only have we seen some great successes, our preliminary results show savings and benefits of \$8 for every dollar invested."

—Randy Bertram

Wisconsin Manufacturing Extension Partnership



"We had a number of waste streams that were becoming cost-prohibitive," says Joel Banks, the company's director of operations. "We are always concerned about the proper management of water and chemicals, and saw this as a chance to access capital and resources to help us improve."

Whitefield focused on its processes for cleaning and chromating aluminum. The PSI grant helped the company identify, test and purchase equipment that it estimates will reduce water consumption by 30 percent and reclaim about 20 percent of the chemicals the company uses. Instead of the company spending close to \$100,000 as recommended by previous proposals, their solution will cost less than \$20,000.

"This shows that you can put together projects that are green and end up with competitive returns," says Banks.

ACH Foam Technologies, based in Fond du Lac, manufactures expanded polystyrene foam products. The company's interest in the PSI initiative focuses on heat recovery and transfer.

"It's very important to maintain our expanded beads at a constant temperature in the 90- to 105-degree

range throughout our process," says Todd Huempfnr, senior vice president of operations at ACH. "And that's more difficult with the seasonal variations in Wisconsin."

ACH is using PSI funding to build a bead conditioning room that will be warmed by heat transferred from the boiler room. The process will reduce cycle time in the molding of expanded polystyrene by 6 to 8 percent and curing time in the conditioning room by 3 to 5 percent. It will also decrease mineral oil use by about 30 percent.

"We were already looking at the heat recovery idea, but needed capital to move it forward," says Huempfnr. "The PSI grant helped us do this sooner, rather than later."

Sheboygan-based Saco Polymers produces cross-linkable polyethylene pellets for the wire, cable and pipe industries.


"We wanted to reduce the amount of hazardous materials needed to produce a chemical reaction, reduce volatile emissions and remove hazardous waste from the waste stream," says Matt McLaughlin, a Saco quality engineer and the project manager for the company's PSI effort.

According to McLaughlin, the company has developed testing procedures that have removed significant variability from their processes. Employees are finishing experiments to make their product under lab conditions and are close to rolling it out on a production scale.

"We're expecting a payoff that will be big – possibly a six-figure savings – and are anticipating a one-year payback. It is right in line with our core values to not just be green, but to be sustainable. In the long run, it will help us become a stronger organization, to keep people employed – and that's good for Wisconsin and good for everybody," says McLaughlin.

Randy Bertram, senior manufacturing specialist for WMEP and program manager for the Profitable Sustainability Initiative, is pleased with the results of the pilot.

"Between actual dollars and consulting time and services, WMEP has provided an average of \$30,000 of resources per company," he says.

"Not only have we seen some great successes, our preliminary results show savings and benefits of \$8 for every dollar invested. The participating firms are motivated to seek assistance, and grateful and open about what they are doing," concludes Bertram. "And that says a lot about the future of manufacturing in our state." 

## CLOSER LOOK

New North companies participating in the Profitable Sustainability Initiative:

- » ACH Foam Technologies, Fond du Lac
  - » Alive & Kickin' Pizza Crust, Green Bay
  - » Dutchland Plastics Corp., Oostburg
  - » KCS International, Oconto
  - » MEGTEC Systems, De Pere
  - » Quality Packaging, Fond du Lac
  - » Saco Polymers, Sheboygan
  - » Salm Partners, Denmark
  - » Shelmet Precision Casting Co., Wild Rose
  - » Wausaukee Composites, Wausaukee
  - » Whitefield Industrial Coatings, Oshkosh
- For more information: Wisconsin Manufacturing Extension Partnership, [www.wmep.org](http://www.wmep.org)