

CRAWL BEFORE YOU WALK – SMALL STEPS TOWARDS SUSTAINABILITY

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For many consumer products manufacturers, sustainable packaging seems like an unending, insurmountable project. Well, it is true that sustainable packaging is never fully achieved, for it is an ongoing process. However, that doesn't mean you should dismiss the task and do nothing to improve your company's impact on the environment. You CAN make a measurable difference by implementing small improvements, and save a few bucks along the way.

A quick evaluation of your plant and some common sense are enough to get you started on your way to sustainability. Look at all of the things in your plant that require power or produce waste. From the lights on the ceiling to sophisticated packaging equipment, the energy used for these things can almost always be reduced.

A good example of excessive energy waste not widely recognized is compressed air. Many people consider air "free". This is certainly not the case in manufacturing facilities. Compressed air is measured in cubic feet per minute (CFM). The average cost of compressed air is \$0.02 per CFM per hour. Much of the industrial equipment used in manufacturing facilities has pneumatic, air powered components. Some require an enormous amount of air in order to run. And many times these are left running while idle, thus wasting even more air, energy and money.

Let's consider an automated label printer/appliator, which is a common piece of equipment in any consumer products manufacturing facility. A traditional pneumatic powered tamp unit uses about 3 CFM, which equates to about \$552.00 per year. There are new, electric labelers on the market that require no air. These eco-friendly labelers cost about \$48.00 per year to operate. In this scenario it is easy to measure the benefit – to your budget and the environment. And the math is based on just one unit. Many facilities run a half dozen or more labelers!

Besides wasted power, consider wasted packaging materials, such as preprinted boxes. Many plants order and stock thousands of pre-printed boxes, many of which go to the trash as their preprinted information becomes obsolete. An online case printing system eliminates this concern.

Process and procedure should also be analyzed. How factory personnel work also effects energy consumption and costs. This is as simple as evaluating the usage of power tools, HVAC and lighting. Common sense....

Another easy way to help the environment is reducing the amount of hazardous materials used when producing and packaging products. In many cases there are alternate materials available that are less harsh. Assess things like the glue used to seal boxes and ink used to date code products. Is there a low VOC option?

The bottom line is that small steps make a difference. And in most cases, those small measures can save companies thousands and thousands of dollars per year. The biggest mistake is to take no action because of the enormity of the process. Break it down. Crawl. Then walk.