

Clearing the Air

Purafil goes Lean to sell air-cleaning pellets more effectively

Lean Manufacturing has been widely praised for its ability to streamline the manufacturing process, but its application to other business processes has been largely unexplored.

Until now.

Recently, Quick Start began working with Purafil, a client that needed to improve its sales process, and Lean thinking ultimately guided the project to successful completion.

Purafil, one of Quick Start's first existing-industry projects, is a 34-year-old company that makes air-purification systems for petrochemical refineries, wastewater treatment plants, hospitals and museums. The technology works by blowing air through an air-handling system filled with chemical pellets, or "media," which remove contaminants and odors for about a year until replaced.

Purafil makes both the air-handling system and the chemical pellets at its sole plant, located in Doraville. Although Purafil systems are installed at such internationally famous attractions as the Tower of London, Smithsonian Institution and Sydney Opera House, it's a

David Clay, chemical plant manager, checks one of the air-handling systems Purafil manufactures. The custom-built boxes come in hundreds of different sizes and shapes, depending on customer needs.



small company with only about 70 employees.

"Lean Manufacturing is the principle tool used by larger companies to improve productivity," says Purafil CEO Bill Weiller, "and now it's time for small companies like us to begin using it as an ongoing process."

Approximately 120 independent manufacturer's representatives scattered throughout the world sell the Purafil systems and replacement chemicals to some 12,000 end users. With a sales force and end-user base this large, Purafil needed to standardize the sales process.

So Purafil called on Quick Start to find a solution. In a productive working partnership, a Quick Start team met with Purafil executives every other month to delve into Lean fundamentals. They deconstructed and re-evaluated every minute aspect of the sales process, including selection and training of sales reps.

By the end of the process, they had successfully formulated a template for selling Purafil's products according to Lean principles.

"We wanted our sales reps to know the drill, and we also needed tools to keep track of media-replacement ordering," recalls Kevin Jameson, Purafil VP of



Purafil CEO Bill Weiller displays the purple pellets used to purify air in such world-renowned venues as the Sistene Chapel.

operations. The team devised an internet database tracking system so that Purafil could push that information to sales reps instead of relying on them to supply it.

After implementing the new procedures, Jameson says, the company saw results almost immediately.

"Some end users had forgotten about their installations, so we got some large orders very quickly." In addition, he reports that FY02 media replacement sales were the highest ever in Purafil's history.

The company was grateful not only for the increased sales of media

replacement but also for the Lean application to one of its box models that cut the cost of manufacturing by 50 percent.

"I am impressed by the ease with which Quick Start put us into the Lean Manufacturing process," says Weiller, who is a prominent voice in a number of international business groups focusing on trade and development issues.

"Quick Start provides the tools, then we can manage for ourselves," he says. "Quick Start is one of Georgia's solid stories of success." 