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Focus: Business & The Environment

R.I. company reducing energy use

By Natalie Myers,
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By the end of this year, Dryvit Systems Inc. plans to have uniform policies and procedures in place to recycle paper, cardboard, batteries and light bulbs at each of its five North American locations.

Management and employees will be “on board” to reduce the company’s natural gas, electricity and water consumption at those locations, and to reduce solid waste sent to landfills and wastewater discharged into the environment.

The company also plans to reduce noise emissions and dust particle emissions in its factories.

All are components of the company’s environmental policy, set up to obtain ISO 14001:2004 certification at Dryvit Systems’ North American plants, said Peter Balint, president and CEO of the multinational company, which is based in West Warwick.



Dryvitt Plant Manager Gary Ridenour points out the new electrical system that the company is putting into place to help reduce electricity consumption. With the help of National Grid they have reduced consumption by almost 40 percent.

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So far, the certification has been obtained by Dryvit Systems' Oklahoma and Georgia locations. The company's Rhode Island headquarters is next.

ISO 14001 is an environmental management standard created by the International Organization for Standardization, which is a nongovernmental organization that receives input from the private sector and public sector.

The company started discussing its environmental outlook about five years ago.

"We have all these environmental regulations that we have to meet in different places," Balint said. "We really needed a procedure and a process whereby we could really focus our management's attention on that."

Dryvit Systems already meets ISO 9000:2000 certification for implementing quality standards and measures at its plants, he said. The company has maintained the standard for 10 years.

"All of our plants are certified," he said. "Our people were trained."

It was a natural progression, therefore, to move forward with ISO 14001, he said, because the process is similar and the record-keeping is similar, so it didn't require retraining employees in that regard.

And the benefits are substantial, Balint said.

For one, it helps the company when working with the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency. It reduces the paperwork and the number of additional checks and inspections the EPA might need because all of the company's environmental information is documented and organized.

In some cases, the program provides a cost advantage, said Jan Nogradi, vice president of operations and corporate development at Dryvit Systems. When the plants start recycling cardboard, for example, most recycling companies will pick it up for free.

"The saving on our side is our disposal costs are reduced," Nogradi said. "We reduce the number of Dumpsters we have to pay for."

Asked what other returns on investment the program offers, Balint said, "I don't need to do a return on investment calculation to know that this is something we should be doing, and we'll save money."

He added: "I'd rather not spend quality time here trying to figure out return on investment for something that's common sense. ... It's on our bottom line. We're improving profitability every year."

The move makes sense for Dryvit Systems from a philosophical stance as well, because the company manufactures an insulating exterior cladding for buildings that actually reduces the energy it takes to heat and cool buildings by 20 to 40 percent, he said.

Balint said he often sees commercial building owners fail to better insulate their buildings because they are looking at the return on investment, which would take four years to realize if they used Dryvit Systems' products.

"One of the things I think the American business community needs to understand is there are certain things that are the right thing to do," he said.

Balint argued that eventually better insulation would cause the building's value to go increase. Similarly, Dryvit Systems' efforts to be a "green" company make it more competitive in the global market place.

"There has been a tremendous focus in the last 18 months from architects and builders about green building processes," he said. "At first it was product-oriented. Now they want to know that your company is green."

Implementing the ISO 14001 program required a \$150,000 upfront investment, mostly for a consultant to create a management overview of the program. And it costs about \$20,000 per plant per year to maintain the program, Balint said.

The company has not hired additional employees to implement or maintain the program, Nogradi said, adding: "All the people do this as part of their regular job."

The company employs 100 people in Rhode Island and 450 people worldwide.

"It's not a money constraint, it's a management constraint," Balint said. "We have a measure and quality board that meets every 60 days [for the ISO 9000 program]. ... We review all the quality issues in all of the plants."

When ISO personnel audit the plants once a year, they want to see the minutes to those meetings. The process is similar what ISO 14001 requires.

In addition to ISO 14001, Dryvit Systems has invested \$70,000 at its Rhode Island headquarters to replace standard light bulbs with more energy-efficient light bulbs and is replacing standard light switches with sensor switches that turn off when people leave a room.

The company's Rhode Island location participates in a National Grid rebate program, in which the utility gives companies a rebate equal to 20 percent of the cost of equipment if it reduces electricity consumption by a certain amount, Nogradi said.

In addition, Balint said he is talking to National Grid about adding Dryvit Systems' product to the list of energy-saving products that companies can get a discount for using.