

Small starts lead to green gains

Employees in Commercial Airplanes Fabrication boost recycling to eliminate waste, generate savings for Boeing, suppliers



PHOTO: Ron Misko (left) and Allan Merced, with the Fabrication Interiors Responsibility Center in Everett, Wash., recycle end-wall cradles. The plastic ends support and protect the ends of rolled material received from suppliers. GAIL HANUSA/BOEING

By Robin McBride

“It really started out with one item,” recalled Ron Stever, a Commercial Airplanes Fabrication employee who leads the Fab “green team.” For Stever and his colleagues in the Interiors Responsibility Center in Everett, Wash., that one item in 2007—the year Boeing announced aggressive environmental targets to increase recycling 25 percent by 2012—set off a departmentwide recycling and reuse effort that continues to reap rewards for Boeing, its suppliers and the environment.

The item? Wood pallets. Within the IRC, the Raw Materials team identified a way to reuse the wood pallets that they previously would have thrown away. With that first step, and the support of operations manager Mike Green, the Raw Materials team eventually joined other ecology-minded IRC work groups to form the facility’s “green team.” Led by Stever, IRC stow-bin operations manager, green team members have helped the IRC significantly improve its environmental performance.

Employees at the IRC design, manufacture, assemble and integrate a wide range of interior systems for commercial airplanes, including crew rest areas, stow bins and partitions. The IRC also supplies those systems to the Spares organization for retrofitting airplanes already in service. On any given day, the IRC Raw Materials team receives as many as 15 shipments from suppliers. Because of the sheer volume, Stever and the green team knew they could make specific, sustainable environmental improvements.

“Identifying the right project was the first step in the process for us. We knew we could improve our recycling and reuse efforts significantly,” Stever said. “We just needed to step back and focus on one improvement at a time.” Green suggested the green team find out what happened to the packaging materials—mostly new wood pallets—after shipments were processed.

“We noticed a common pattern,” Green said. “Once the supplies were removed, the empty pallets were crushed and thrown away. That meant 60 to 70 pallets, which were in perfect shape, were being scrapped each week.”

Armed with that information, the team identified a potential solution and contacted Boeing supplier Cytec Engineered Materials. The new process optimizes the current shipping process: Previously, Boeing Transportation arranged through a local carrier in Washington to transport each shipment of fresh material from the California supplier to the IRC. Now, the carrier starts each trip at the Everett site, where the team loads the truck with the reusable materials. The carrier then transports the items to California, delivers them, and then loads and carries the ordered shipment back to Washington.

The first load of recycled materials took about three hours to situate in the truck and resulted in some lessons learned. “All loads after that have taken 30 minutes or less to load,” said Kurt Watson, of the IRC Raw Materials receiving and warehousing group. The new process represents a savings of approximately 8.25 tons (7,484 kilograms) of waste and an estimated \$7,025 (less any pallet reconditioning costs).

With that success under its belt, the green team began to see everything in the factory a little differently, according to Stever. Before long, the team found ways to reduce, reuse or resell nearly every type of packaging material delivered to the IRC.

Since the first experimental truckload 10 months ago, the green team has worked with Cytec to take back other shipping components such as end-wall cradles and plastic

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– Mike Green, Interiors Responsibility Center, Raw Materials Operations manager



PHOTO: Thanks to these engaged employees in Everett, Wash., some materials once discarded are now reused: Ron Stever (left), Michael Green, Rodney Rutt, Curtis Watson, Fausto Ochoa, Steven Knoblauch, Marvin Knoblauch, Barry Smith, Blaine Smith, Albert Stivala, Ron Misko, Andrew Schrader, Kenneth Blanchard. Not shown: Diane McClay, Daryl McElroy and Allan Merced. GAIL HANUSA/BOEING

foam. Today, the IRC has successfully returned more than 65 percent of pallets and shipping materials for reuse back to this supplier—representing more than 33 tons (nearly 30,000 kilograms).

This success has set the example for workplace reuse and recycling in the IRC. Now when someone in the shop points out a potential for reuse, team members don't hesitate to contact the supplier to see whether there's an opportunity to work together. "We've found that many of our suppliers are eager to work with us on environmental projects," said Ron Misko, a green team member who works in the receiving and warehousing group within IRC Raw Materials.

No idea is too small for the IRC green team. For example, the team also found a way to reuse safety glasses. Instead of being thrown away, used safety glasses now go to Veterans Independent Enterprises of Washington, a disabled veteran's organization near Tacoma, Wash., which refurbishes and

repackages the glasses before returning them to Boeing, for a savings of 30 percent per pair.

As word spreads about what teammates have been able to accomplish, the IRC green team keeps growing. It now has more than 25 members from across the IRC, up from six just a year ago.

"The improvements we've made in the IRC are good, but they are just the tip of the iceberg," said Beth Anderson, IRC director. "We have outlined aggressive goals to continue reducing our solid waste, energy consumption and overall carbon footprint. Our plan is at least one zero-waste-to-landfill manufacturing cell by the end of the year."

"The key to the future—our future—is to continue to involve people," Green said. "Keeping it simple and focusing on the small stuff will amount to big savings over time." ■

robin.m.mcbride@boeing.com