



Manufacturing Green

Unarco's environmental commitment

Time was, not even the most optimistic environmentalists could have imagined manufacturers proudly recognized for their contributions to clean air and energy conservation. America's manufacturers were then an embattled lot as our industrial base shrank. The last thing most people expected was their enthusiastic commitment to environmental policies and practices that only added to their economic burdens.

So it was thought. Since then, many manufacturers actually have taken a lead in environmental compliance. In the process, they've discovered that it can be sound business strategy as well.

Among the companies that now play such a leadership role, Unarco Material Handling, Inc. — which manufactures structural and roll-formed pallet racking along with warehouse storage systems for American distribution centers and retail stores — is a stellar example.

Based in Springfield, Tennessee, Unarco was the first in the state to obtain an operating permit from the EPA under the Clean Air Act's Title V Air Quality Standards. Key to that distinction, says Unarco President Gary Slater, was the switch at most of its facilities from liquid to powder-coated paints, which emit zero or near-zero volatile compounds into the atmosphere.

The benefits of powder coating are numerous. "Not only is the finish more durable, there's less hazardous waste produced, which means lower costs for the producer," says Slater. "It's just one example of how environmentally friendly practices can result in significant economic advantages for manufacturers, and not just add compliance responsibilities."

Unarco is an example of how established manufacturers have adapted to the brave new green world of the 21st century. The company was founded in 1956 (Slater would join it 40 years later) and now has 410 employees in three facilities: Lewis-

ville, Texas and Pandora, Ohio, as well as Springfield. The Pandora plant also has been recognized by OSHA for its

superior working conditions and by the EPA for its environmentally sensitive use of cleansing chemicals.

The list of Unarco's other accolades is quite extensive, including, for

example, the Governor's Award for Excellence in Hazardous Waste Management, bestowed by the State of Tennessee. The company puts enough priority on environmental commitment to include a dedicated page on its Web site. Among the numerous green initiatives featured there, recycling looms large. Unarco annually separates and recycles nearly 14 million pounds of scrap metal and dunnage materials.

Unarco also conducts business on a veritably paper-free basis. The company has invested heavily in systems and software, including a centralized intranet, to ensure that billing, purchase orders and payments are transmitted electronically whenever possible, requiring no paper or mailing.

"We've also worked with the University of Tennessee to determine, among other things, if powder paint waste can possibly be reused to enhance soil quality," says Slater. "It's an example of how environmentally sound practices, like our use of powder coating, can be built upon to produce further benefits. Once you start making progress, it doesn't stop."

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—Gary Slater

ADVANTAGES OF POWDER COATING

- + Zero or near-zero VOC emissions
- + Thicker coating without running
- + Overspray can be recycled
- + Less hazardous waste
- + More durable
- + Costs less

HOW DOES POWDER COATING WORK?

