

Best Practices SUSTAINABILITY

Innovative Advances in Sustainability: SPRINGS WINDOW FASHIONS

SPRINGS WINDOW FASHIONS BACKGROUND

Springs Window Fashions has a long, successful heritage in the manufacturing of innovative blinds, shades and drapery hardware for the consumer's home under the brand names of Bali®, Graber®, Nanik and for many private brands. Springs Window Fashions' mission is to be the leading provider of fashionable and functional high-quality window treatments that represent value to customers. Springs sets the standard for total quality and superior products through fashion leadership and continuous availability of fresh, new products.

Springs comprises three component manufacturing plants and two distribution centers in the United States, and three assembly plants in Mexico. This makes them the only vertically integrated company in the industry. They employ over 500 people in Middleton and over 4500 people in the U.S. and Mexico.

Springs has developed "Green by Nature™" business practices that include high-recycling manufacturing facilities, environmentally friendly material harvesting, energy-efficient window treatments and healthy-home window treatments that are tested for low volatile organic compound emissions.

GREEN BY NATURE

Per Scott Fawcett, CEO of Springs Window Fashions, "At Springs Window Fashions, being 'green' isn't just a fad or a label on a product. It's deeply embedded in both the nature of our company and our window treatments." This commitment to respecting the earth is a long-term part of the philosophy that guides Springs as they conduct business. As a socially responsible company, Springs is constantly searching for ways to reduce waste, save energy, eliminate hazardous materials and improve indoor air



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CEO, Springs Window Fashions

SPRINGS WINDOW FASHIONS the Best Experience Company



Location: Middleton, Wisconsin
Industry: Window Blinds and Shades
Size: 500+ employees in Wisconsin
Contact: Tom Rodgers, Director of Marketing

quality to lessen the impact on the environment. Springs' people, processes and products are all key components of this commitment." Springs' corporate approach has become "Green is Lean. Take the waste out of every product, process and job."

Springs vows that their environmental initiatives will always be connected back to a real consumer need or benefit, and their eco-friendly claims will be supported by solid statistics. While they realize being "green" is a journey with no end-point, Springs Window Fashions is continuing along the path they began paving well over a decade ago.

Their goal is to minimize the overall environmental impact of the company and products by using recycled, renewable and reduced content materials over virgin sources, reducing energy usage and waste, and improving air and water efficiency and indoor air quality. Their efforts go well beyond individual products and extend into their processes and the actions of their people.

PEOPLE

Social responsibility has been a part of Springs Window Fashions' corporate culture for nearly a decade, and they believe every day presents multiple opportunities for their employees to "go green." Some examples include:

- Recycling bins for aluminum, plastic, paper, toner and cardboard are conveniently positioned throughout their offices. Office machines – such as computers, copiers and printers – are Energy Star-rated and set to time-out in power saver mode when not in use.
- Office lighting has been switched to best-in-class T8 fixtures for maximum energy savings.
- Four-cylinder vehicles for field sales associates receive 5,000-mile service inspections that peak fuel efficiency, while in-vehicle routing and mapping software optimizes call routes to save gas and reduce emissions.
- Plant and office workers are encouraged to share their ideas for leaner and "greener" products and processes.

What does SUSTAINABILITY mean to businesses?

The most commonly used definition of Sustainability incorporates the precept of *"meeting the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs."* Now this is a pretty far reaching statement and is not particularly helpful to businesses driven by production goals, quality improvement, increased efficiency and cost cutting. As we talk to those business leaders already engaged in sustainability efforts, the terms they tell us include:

- (1) consider the entire life cycle of the product and of physical assets;
- (2) consider the effect on the community infrastructure;
- (3) environmental solutions must have a business purpose and bring value to the business;
- (4) you must have passion for it and enable staff to be innovative.

We've found that sustainability is a very broad subject incorporating product design, procurement, production, packaging, logistics, facilities design and operation, safety, health, leadership, employee involvement and community support. We've also learned that while companies exhibiting best practices may not hit every one of those marks, they get pretty close. So choose a definition that best suits your business, but know that the companies we've talked with are successful partly because of their passion for sustainability, not in spite of it.

- Factory associates receive incentives based on scrap reduction goals.
- Meetings internally and with customers utilize phone / internet technologies whenever possible, reducing travel and fuel usage.
- SWF is a major supporter of charities such as United Way and finds ways to link sustainability into community support.
- The company sponsors an annual Employee Electronics Recycling Day where employees can properly dispose of personal electronics. The employee and company each make a contribution to a local charity for every item recycled.

PROCESSES

Being green is both beneficial for business and creates a beneficial experience for Springs employees, partners and end-users. As a result, they regularly surpass legislative environmental mandates, rather than simply abiding by local, state and federal requirements. Some accomplishments include:

- 43 million pounds of industrial waste generated in the Middleton facility have been recycled and diverted from landfills over the past 10 years.
- 90 million gallons of water are saved every year with the installation of a closed-loop water cooling system for the Middleton plastic extrusion equipment. And that's 90 million gallons of water the Middleton water treatment plant does not have to treat.
- 4,500 tons of sawdust are recycled annually in a waste-to-energy program in their Grayling, Michigan wood fabrication plant. More than 99 percent of their total sawdust is transformed into energy to fire the lumber drying kilns and heat the factory – or is converted to wood stove pellets.
- 71 percent reduction in airborne emissions has occurred in Middleton since 2000. Exhaust air scrubbers have been added at this facility to reduce VOCs by 52 percent.
- A minimum of 44 percent of post-consumer recycled materials is included in the packaging of all Springs Window Fashions' products. Each package is carefully engineered and tested to minimize the use of materials without sacrificing the integrity of the product.
- 100 percent of packaging materials are able to be recycled.

PRODUCTS

While window coverings are inherently 'green by nature' because they block solar heat gain (reduces A/C energy) and prevent UV damage (increase life of furniture, flooring – reduces premature replacement / landfill waste), products from Springs go beyond blocking light and heat in terms of eco-friendliness. Product features include: GREENGUARD and Oeko-Tex¹ certified low VOC emission fabrics; high recycled content materials; use of renewable materials such as bamboo, jute and grasses; and use of high R-Value materials.

GREEN BY NATURE PROGRAM

In 2007 Springs leadership asked themselves what are they are supposed to do about sustainability. Initially, they appointed their Director of Marketing, Tom Rodgers, to assess what sustainability meant to the company and established a company-wide, cross functional Green Team to launch the effort. After a short period, they determined all employees needed to take ownership, so they eliminated the team and made sustainability a part of every employee's job. Today, Springs CEO, Scott Fawcett, regularly makes sustainability a part of company wide quarterly associates meetings.

Spings retained the international design engineering firm of URS Corporation² to conduct a sustainability audit of the company and their products. Plant managers at each facility were asked to provide 10 years of operational and utility data, and each facility went through an extensive analysis utilizing the GHG Protocol³ and other tools to identify accomplishments, opportunities and key problem areas. Because they had already implemented many energy efficiency and waste reduction projects as good business practices, Springs management was pleased to find they were rated well ahead of many of their competitors in the industry, but still had a list of projects to improve waste reduction and reduce their carbon footprint. While they already had an extensive recycling program in place, the site surveys identified a number of additional opportunities for waste reduction.

In addition to facility surveys, URS audited one of every product line to compare to LEED standards. As a result, Springs produces a LEED⁴ data sheet for every product⁵. Armed with this information, Springs is able to market the sustainability features of their products. Additionally, they are working with the NFRC/EPA, seeking Energy Star ratings for their products.

PACKAGING AND TRANSPORTATION

Spings Packaging Engineering Group is charged with designing product packaging to reduce material use, increase recycling content, and reduce weight which, in turn, reduces transportation fuel usage.

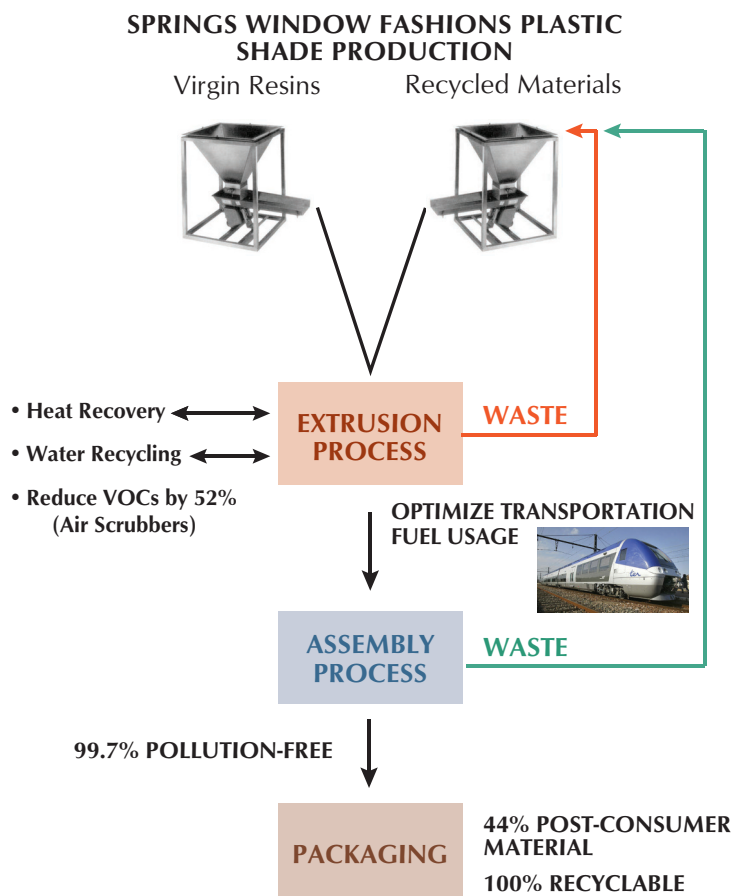


Spings uses modular rail transportation, particularly in moving shade and drape components to Mexico for assembly. This produces a smaller carbon footprint than over-the-road transportation. Waste materials from the assembly process are then returned to the slat manufacturing plants for reuse/recycling.

FACILITIES

Spings has made extensive modifications to all of their facilities to save energy. High efficiency lighting has been installed in manufacturing spaces, offices and warehouses. Wherever possible, lighting is controlled by motion sensors. In addition, vending machines have been placed on timers, and copying and printing functions have been centralized, requiring fewer machines and optimizing toner usage.

RECYCLING



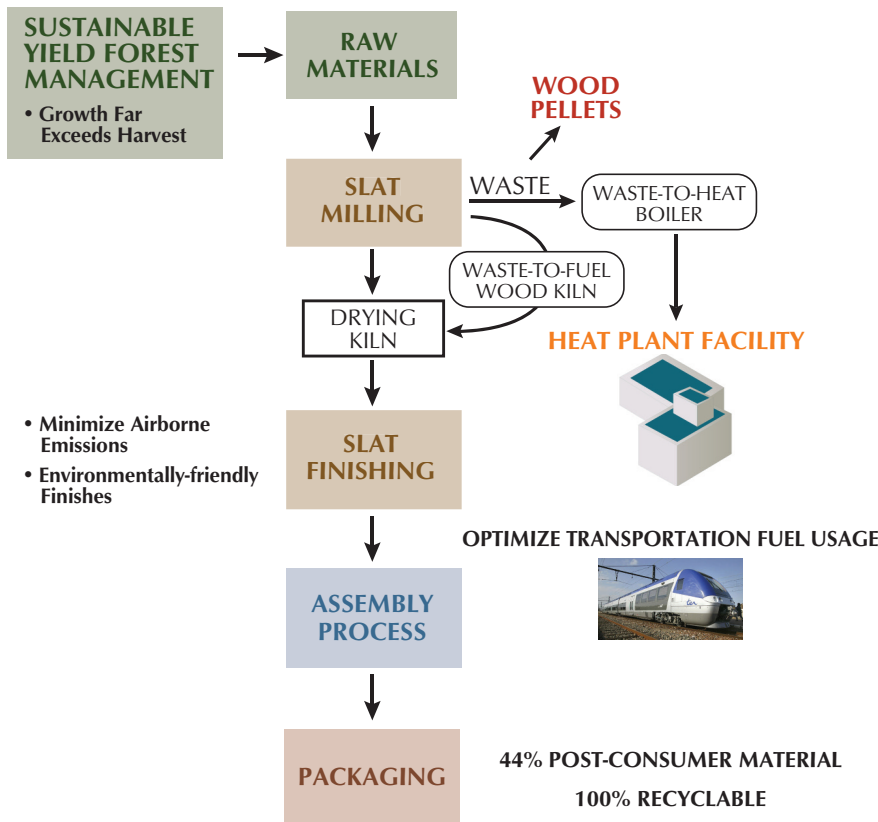
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RECYCLING CONTINUED

SPRINGS WINDOW FASHIONS WOOD SHADE PRODUCTION



REFERENCES

¹**Oeko-Tex®**

Standard 100 is a global uniform testing and certification system for textile raw materials, intermediate, and end products at all stages of production.
www.oeko-tex.com

²**URS Corporation**

600 Montgomery Street, 26th Floor
San Francisco, CA 94111-2728 USA
+1 (415) 774-2700
+1 (415) 398-1905 fax
www.urscorp.com

³**Greenhouse Gas Protocol**

The Greenhouse Gas Protocol (GHG Protocol) is the most widely used international accounting tool for government and business leaders to understand, quantify, and manage greenhouse gas emissions. A decade-long partnership between the World Resources Institute (WRI) and the World Business Council for Sustainable Development (WBCSD), the GHG Protocol is working with businesses, governments, and environmental groups around the world to build a new generation of credible and effective programs for tackling climate change.

⁴**LEED**

LEED is an internationally recognized green building certification system, providing third-party verification that a building or community was designed and built using strategies aimed at improving performance across all the metrics that matter most: energy savings, water efficiency, CO2 emissions reduction, improved indoor environmental quality, and stewardship of resources and sensitivity to their impacts.
www.usgbc.org

Developed by the U.S. Green Building Council (USGBC), LEED provides building owners and operators a concise framework for identifying and implementing practical and measurable green building design, construction, operations and maintenance solutions.

⁵**Green Information** by product examples:

- Aluminum Horizontal Blinds
Green Info Sheet 56.9 KB
LEED Data Sheet 28.2 KB
- Cellular Shades
Green Info Sheet 57.1 KB
LEED Data Sheet 28.2 KB
- Composite Blinds
Green Info Sheet 56.9 KB
<http://www.greenbaliblinds.com>

SUMMARY

At Springs Window Fashions, being green isn't just a fad or a label or product; it's deeply embedded in both the nature of their company and their products. As a socially responsible company, Springs is constantly searching for ways to reduce waste, save energy, eliminate hazardous materials and improve indoor air quality to lessen their impact on the environment. Their people, processes and products are all key components of this commitment. Springs Window Fashions truly is "Green by Nature".