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Tampa Company Saves Waste by Getting Lean

TAMPA – Working with the project managers at the Florida Manufacturing Extension Partnership has proven both profitable and worthwhile, according to Scott Feldman, general manager of Kaf-flex, a manufacturer of hoses for swimming pools and hot tubs.

“I turned to the Florida MEP because I wanted to get an outsiders view on the company, our production lines and our manufacturing processes,” said Feldman. “Since Kaf-flex was only recently purchased by Heyco Products Co. of New Jersey, there was a willingness to get input from outside consultants.

“I was definitely open to suggestions,” Feldman added, “but I must admit, the results were more successful than I initially thought they ever could be.”

Feldman said his biggest surprise was how quickly the MEP project managers worked and how candid his employees were in dealing with the MEP. “Within two or three days, the project managers had uncovered some serious tensions between our people and suggested solutions on how to deal with them,” Feldman said.

“I decided the best way to solve our problems, including some structural issues within the company, was to get involved in the Lean Manufacturing techniques taught by the Florida MEP,” Feldman said.

In a nutshell, within a few weeks, several deficiencies had been identified and addressed and a significant improvement had been made in the waste and scrap generated by the Kaf-flex manufacturing process.

MEP’s project managers discovered that a major contributor to waste was a lack of awareness of the total cost of wasted materials, including lost production opportunity and handling of the product that is systematically destroyed when not meeting specifications.

“We make PVC hoses through an extruding process,” Feldman said. “The hoses are made in 100-foot lengths. Unfortunately, if something is wrong with a portion of that hose, the entire thing becomes scrap.”

With 11 manufacturing lines going 24 hours a day, seven days a week, plenty of hose is being made by Kaf-flex. “The problem is simple, however,” Feldman said. “When we make hose that fast, we need to monitor and understand our process so well that we make necessary adjustments before any scrap is made.”

With MEP’s help, there is now a system in place to improve the set-up, monitor the hose manufacturing and a way to measure how much scrap has been made and have it categorized into certain categories.

Feldman said, “Scrap material generation has been reduced by an equivalent of several thousands of dollars per year. In addition, thanks to the Lean techniques, we expect to experience a considerable amount of savings in labor costs.”

“These are the type of testimonials we enjoy hearing,” said Maria Alfano, director of operations for the Florida MEP. “It is always rewarding for our project managers to work with company officials open to suggestions on improvements and Lean Manufacturing.

“In fact, in the case of Kaf-flex, more than 60 ideas for improvement were suggested by the company’s own workforce. Many of those suggestions have already been implemented and have resulted in enhanced manufacturing techniques and product quality.

“I am proud of everyone in the company who has had a hand in this remarkable success story,” Alfano said.

A 12-year old company, Kaf-flex is located in a 36,000-square-foot facility and currently has 30 employees. Kaf-flex specializes in flexible PVC hose and electrical conduit that is produced using state-of-the-art laser monitoring devices that help to ensure consistent high quality products. As one of the premier suppliers of hose, conduit and tubing, Kaf-flex also offers custom cutting, printing and packaging of products to meet the wide variety of individual customer needs.

At the present time, the company sells most of its products to OEM manufacturers and through wholesale distributors around North America. A second plant was recently purchased and is now open in California.

“The Florida MEP has proven to be absolutely worthwhile,” Feldman said. “We are continuing to make improvements based on the specific recommendations we received from the project managers and the Lean process definitely will continue.”

The Florida MEP is an affiliate of the National Institute of Standards and Technology (NIST) under the U.S. Department of Commerce. The national MEP is a network of manufacturing extension centers that provide business and technical assistance to smaller manufacturers in all 50 states, the District of Columbia and Puerto Rico. Through MEP, manufacturers have access to more than 2000 manufacturing and business “coaches” whose job is to help firms make changes that lead to greater productivity, increased profits, and enhanced global competitiveness. For more information on the Florida MEP program call 321-939-4000.