



A green frame of mind in the workshop?

In the comic books of our youth the Incredible Hulk turned green when he was angry. Probably few amongst us would profess to being so concerned about the environment that it really made us angry, but by now even the most cynical are suspecting that there is more to the “green” movement than just fashion and faddishness. Our children’s generation are taught about environmental issues from their primary school days, and are quite likely to ask us, “Just what do you do to help the environment at work?” And the answer may well be an embarrassing silence.

Of course, it’s quite difficult to be “thinking green” when you are working underneath a fleshing machine which, if you’re lucky, has had a quick squirt with a hose before you started work. But when we do get a few moments to think, it is worth considering the small things that we can do to reduce the wastage of energy and resources, minimise pollution and promote recycling. After all, one of the mottos of the green movement is “Think globally, act locally”—if enough people do the small things, the big things will start to happen by themselves.

For example, what happens to the oil drained from gearboxes and tanks at oil change time? It should be collected and stored—in containers that don’t leak—until there is sufficient to warrant a visit from a waste oil collection company. At its plant they will clean, blend it, and produce light fuel oil to be burnt in boilers—possibly in your tannery boiler, if you want to push the recycling message further. What happens to your scrap metal? Is everything just thrown in the skip with all of the general rubbish? It’s no hardship to collect steel, brass and aluminium scrap separately, or to maybe recycle old chemical drums as containers, and there may even be a small bonus from the scrap man for sorted metals. You may well find that up in the office someone is already saving paper and card for recycling, and once again it is little hardship to collect waste paper from the workshop and add it to theirs. In today’s workshop nearly every job done seems to generate paperwork, but recycling companies are quite happy to accept waste paper with

oily thumbprints.

Out in the tannery the main target for the green-minded engineer is wastage—principally of water and electricity. Let’s press for every hose pipe to be fitted with a pistol-grip gun, so that no-one can walk away and leave water running. Let’s press for every new piece of machinery to be specified with high-efficiency electric motors; the additional cost will be a very small proportion of the total capital expenditure, and will be repaid within two years. Let’s make sure that no new lighting installation goes in without automatic control of some kind, be it infra-red sensors, timed delay switches or programmers. All of these small steps will help to spread the message to the workforce that wastage really matters, and not only will they strengthen the company’s “green” credentials they will all add to the bottom line. Reducing wastage means saving money as well as the planet.

One last thing for you to think about over a hard-earned cup of coffee—What are the worst possible spillage incidents that you can imagine around the tannery? Is there sufficient equipment on hand to deal with them—absorbent mats and granules, mops, drain sealers, portable pumps? If not, then get them, and make sure everyone knows where they are kept and how to use them. If someone complains about the cost, just ask them to check out the level of fines for allowing watercourses, drains and sewers to be polluted—even if it is accidental, the polluter always pays. First aid kits are compulsory in the workplace and, if they haven’t already done so, your insurance company will soon be insisting anti-spillage kits are too, so why not stay ahead of the game?

While the tannery engineer may not be the first person to spring to mind when “green” issues are discussed, few people have greater influence in changing everyone’s habits and attitudes, and the workshop should lead the way. After all, a “green” workshop will be cleaner, tidier, more professional and a better place to work in, and we will at least have some answers when the children start asking awkward questions.....

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