

Green Packaging:



Pipedream or Possibility?

by Penny Stacey

By its very nature, packaging isn't necessarily a green product. Usually made up of plastic and cardboard, it's not the most environmentally friendly portion of a product's make-up—and much of it goes straight to the garbage can. But, in today's green age, many door and window manufacturers are taking steps to make sure that even that part of the business becomes green.

While "green" commitments may seem like they've just popped up in the last year or so, many companies have been taking this stance for several years. Kolbe Windows and Doors is one of these.

"I've been working on [environ-

mentally friendly packaging] for five or seven years, and ... [we aim] to get to the point where 100 percent of our [packaging] material does not go into the landfill," says Jerry Olson, director of purchasing for the Wausau, Wis.-based manufacturer.

Protecting the Product

While many manufacturers are looking at this area and many have made strides, the bottom line when it comes to doors and windows, most say, is making sure they arrive in the condition they're supposed to.

"You always have to think about what it's going to take for a product to get from Point A to Point B, but you also have to think, it's not more environmentally friendly for the

product to be damaged and for us to have to make it again," says Leslie Holsapple, marketing coordinator for Windsor Windows & Doors in West Des Moines, Iowa.

That doesn't mean the company hasn't taken steps to try to reduce the amount of packaging it uses, though—while still protecting the product.

"We package our windows with cardboard sleeves, which we hope, depending on where they're going, that people will recycle those cardboard sleeves," she says. "They don't cover the top or of the bottom of the product—they really cover the corners and the sides, and then we use banding to keep those cardboard sleeves in place, so there's no

“ You always have to think about what it's going to take for a product to get from Point A to Point B, but you also have to think, it's not more environmentally-friendly for the product to be damaged and for us to have to make it again. ”

—Leslie Holsapple, Windsor Windows & Doors

shrink-wrap or stretch wrap used in the packaging of our windows.”

While Windsor does use stretch wrap on its patio doors, the company's continuous improvement department began taking steps to reduce the amount of stretch wrap used two years ago.

“In the beginning, the machine would make five rotations around the unit,” Holsapple says. “As they started to look at this, they thought, ‘do we really need to go around the unit five times?’ And they realized they only needed three times.”

This led to major savings—both from an environmental and cost standpoint.

“When they changed this, it reduced our use of shrink-wrap by 15 percent and it has saved 166 rolls of shrink-wrap a year,” she adds.

Shrink-wrap is a popular item for Kolbe as well; the company currently uses corrugate packaging mostly for packaging its finished products, but is looking at moving in the shrink-wrap direction.

“We have partnered with a couple suppliers to look at eliminating some of the corrugate and to look at moving toward shrink-wrap,” Olson says. “We have a couple suppliers coming in to look at this.” But, as Holsapple noted, an undamaged finished product that arrives at the job site in good condition is efficient from an environmental standpoint—whatever packaging is used.

“The most important thing is to continue to send our product out with a minimal amount of damage,” Olson adds.

Ventana USA in Export, Pa., implemented a brand-new

packaging system in 2004 in order to be environmentally friendly. It wasn't an easy process, though.

“We searched for more than two years to finally locate the producer of a FOAM in the BAG system,” says Tony Pauly, vice present and general manager of the company. “The INSTAPAK product from Sealed Air Corp., along with the SpeedyPacker dispensing equipment, provides excellent protection for our products and is environmentally sensitive. It is free of CFC and HCFC and can be recycled.”

Like Windsor, the company found cost savings through the system as well—as an added bonus to the environmental aspect.

“It provided a substantial decrease in direct cost and major reduction in space requirements to store the packaging material,” Pauly adds.

While Andersen Windows

spokesperson Cameron Snyder was unable to elaborate on what type of packaging the company utilizes to protect its products while remaining environmentally friendly, he notes that this an issue of importance to the Bayport, Minn.-based manufacturer.

“We are committed to conserving natural resources through reduction, reuse and recycling,” Snyder says. “To that end, much of our packaging can be recycled and has been reduced over the past several years on certain products.”

Supplier Success

While finding green packaging that also protects a product has been a challenge for some, many manufacturers have had success eliminating and recycling packaging from their suppliers. Others have made it a point to partner with “green” suppliers.

For example, Windsor purchases its glass from Cardinal Glass, which recently has made changes in this area.

“[Cardinal] delivers all of its insulating glass to us on returnable racks,” Holsapple says. “So, when they arrive here, we unload them, and then we send the racks back to them.”

Glass isn't the only product, however, that's met new packaging methods.

Kolbe has actually developed its own metal, recyclable skid for vinyl and wood lineals.

“The sides drop on the skid after you're done with it, so it can stack, and the skids are all nestable, so they can go back to the suppliers,” Olson says.



Windsor packages its windows in cardboard sleeves. They are held in place with banding during transport.

continued on page 34

Packaging

continued from page 33

“We’ve done that with three different wood suppliers and three different vinyl suppliers.”

He adds, “With our aluminum suppliers, we’ve designed wooden skids that we use and that are returnable.”

Windsor receives its metal supply from Linetec, which also now utilizes returnable cradles.

“The alternative to supplying the metal in cradles was having a row of metal with foam, and then more foam, to protect them from each other—kind of the sandwich that holds the metal together, and stretch wrap would hold it together to keep it all nice and neat,” Holsapple says. “Instead, they package the metal in the steel frame cradles and they’re tied down in a way that prevents the metal from scratching.”

For hardware, Kolbe has developed returnable plastic containers that have not only saved them money for the cost of the corrugated packaging saved, but also time.

“We’ve come up with returnable plastic containers that are specific to the profiles of the parts that the hardware suppliers make,” he says. “They’ll actually put them in the profiles in the containers, then they send them out, and we send them straight to the line. Once removed, we send them back to the suppliers. It eliminates a huge amount of corrugated [packaging] and saves time on both their end and our end.”

Windsor requested a similar system for the shipment of its jambliners from its supplier, Intek. (Olson says Kolbe actually originally developed the Intek system, which it uses also, and eventually Intek purchased the containers so it could use them with other customers.)

“We used to order a massive



Many manufacturers are trying to minimize the amount of cardboard they use in packaging.

amount of jambliners and we’d store them here. They’d wrap up a lot of jambliners in cardboard and they’d send them in a large wooden crate,” Holsapple says.

Now, though, Windsor is receiving more frequent shipments—two to three times a week—and the jambliners are arriving in a new container.

“Rather than coming in the cardboard and the wooden crate, they’re coming in blue bins with dividers,” she says. “So we look at how many double-hungs we have coming up and we let them know, and they ship our jambliners for our double-hungs in the order that we need them to be in.”

However, Holsapple says many question if the additional fuel used to make multiple deliveries makes this process less “green” than it may seem.

“Actually, we’re using less gasoline because Windsor’s shipments are smaller in size, and they’re putting our product on a truck that’s part of their rotation that they’re already doing, and, since it weighs less, it uses less gas,” she says.

Of course, implementing new

How Green Are You?

Are you implementing new methods to become more green, either in packaging or other areas? Please e-mail DWM publisher Tara Taffera at ttaffera@glass.com.

methods often means additional costs—but not in this area.

“[The re-usable packaging] usually pays for itself,” Olson says. “It makes sense for us to be green, because we save money.”

Working with Suppliers

Both Kolbe and Windsor have requested more environmentally friendly packaging methods from suppliers. But they also make an effort to work with suppliers with an overall green mindset, which makes these transitions smooth.

“As we’ve become more green, it’s been important for us to pick vendors who are green too and are likeminded regarding the environment, so we can piggyback off each others’ ideas,” Holsapple says.

Kolbe also tries to make sure that when developing a new, recyclable packaging system, for example, that it will benefit both itself and the supplier.

“Right up front, when we partner with a supplier, we go out there and say, ‘We can save \$10,000 on your account on packaging. We want to save 50 percent on your end and 50 percent on our end,’” Olson says. “Taking that attitude with all our suppliers, we’ve found that we can save on every [element] we’ve looked at so far.”

Are there challenges? Not as long as the supplier understands the benefits, Olson says.

“Once people understand what the potential gains will be, it works really well,” he adds. ■

Penny Stacey is the assistant editor of DWM magazine.