

True Sustainability Is No Fad

IMPO: How did Kimberly-Clark start its sustainability program?



Lisa Morden, global sustainability leader, Kimberly-Clark Professional

Lisa Morden: Kimberly-Clark has been focused on environmental sustainability for quite some time. For more than 30 years, Kimberly-Clark has had a core environmental team to help the company understand, react to and implement mill-based programs to comply with the evolving environmental regulatory landscape of the time. Later, we broadened our environmental sustainability approach, creating global standards for Kimberly-Clark with regard to the environment, and applying them to all of our manufacturing sites around the world.

We knew, as a global organization, that we should be sharing best practices worldwide. What is appropriate or responsible in North America or Europe is also the behavior we should be exhibiting around the world.

IMPO: And what would you say to someone who accused Kimberly-Clark of “greenwashing”?

Lisa Morden: It’s always a challenging thing — what one person perceives as greenwashing another person doesn’t — but fundamentally, the approach Kimberly-Clark takes is that your environmental reality can never be outpaced by your environmental messaging. So what you’re saying in the public domain about the work and progress you make can never, in any way, shape, or form, outpace the

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Published on Industrial Maintenance & Plant Operation (<http://www.impomag.com>)

reality of your operations. And transparency — almost ultra-transparency — is really the way to prove that. We're cautious. We're not overly aggressive and we can back up any and all environmental claims that we make.

IMPO: What did Kimberly-Clark do to make its own manufacturing facilities more efficient? Was it capital investment? Did you find any new technology to make your operation more efficient?

Lisa Morden: "What gets measured gets managed," is the fundamental operating philosophy we employ. As a business, we stepped back and said, "Here are the environmental issues that are most significant to our business. We use water in our manufacturing operations. We use energy in our manufacturing operations. We consume fiber and other raw materials in our manufacturing operations." It's how we responsibly and sustainably use these sources that is fundamentally important to us.

At the outset of our *Vision* program, we began gathering data from all of our manufacturing sites to understand our current environmental footprint — how much water, how much energy, how much fiber do we actually use in these operations? But it also allowed us to see where the opportunities were. If one mill uses three times the amount of water as an equivalent mill with similar technology in another location, there may be an opportunity to share best practices and reduce our environmental impact. We continue to use this approach to identify opportunities to be more sustainable today and in the future.

Once we have that data and can establish benchmarks, we are in a better position to identify achievable goals for action. We can begin to share best practices. And we can begin to identify the existing and future technologies that will help us meet our goals. This requires us to understand the economics and the paybacks required — in other words, there needs to be a business case for environmental sustainability.

IMPO: What advice would you have for small or midsize manufacturers who are still unsure of how to approach a sustainability program? Where should they look first?

Lisa Morden: Start by looking at your compliance status and understanding your current environmental risks. Be sure you have robust systems to mitigate risk — that you are complying with existing environmental regulations and that you can comply with future regulations. Then, you can look to the future and establish objectives that make sense for the type of business you're in. Identify the important environmental issues relative to either the products you manufacture or the type of manufacturing systems or process you utilize. Lean manufacturing should become the foundation for your programs. You have to have solid internal foundations before you have a compelling and real message to take forward.

After that, you can expand your scope by looking at the entire supply chain — from your suppliers to your customers. Make sure you understand what your customers need, want, and expect. Offer them an environmental and social perspective of your business, and then go back to your supply chain. You want your suppliers to be

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living up to the same environmental and social ethos that you have, and perhaps you can push your objectives back through them.

These are complex challenges, but it's not a fad. There's a lot of dialogue about this issue, but fundamentally the issues that have sparked this movement will continue to be challenging going forward. To me, sustainability is not just about the messaging you deliver to the world, it's all about what you do to help ensure your business will thrive and be increasingly sustainable in the future.

Source URL (retrieved on 04/19/2015 - 9:12am):

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