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# Mindful and Aware

## One company's (Puget) Sound sustainability initiatives

The Pacific Northwest is a beautiful place. The combination of forests, snow-capped mountains, and water provides year-round opportunities for people to enjoy the outside—as long as a little misty rain doesn't stop you.

The diverse wildlife on Puget Sound is amazing. Where else can you see signs that caution you of otter crossings and be alerted via text messages of daily orca sightings? The area also is rich with a history related to Native Americans, many of whom still fish these waters. Salmon are considered by many as a treasure that must be nurtured and protected—before eventually being eaten.

Awareness of past excess guides an enforcement of environmental codes that is one of the strictest in the country. There are approximately 3.5 million people living here, many of whom are highly environmentally aware and insist that work done in the area is performed responsibly in order to protect the land, the air, and the water. As such, businesses in the Pacific Northwest must be environmentally accountable.

One manufacturer, on Whidbey Island north of Seattle, has particularly sensitive sustainability issues. Because of its proximity to the water, the likelihood of pollutants escaping from the work site is high. The island where it is located is home to a divergent population that includes retirees, artists, and working families—and many of them care strongly about protecting the environment.

In response, this manufacturer chose a balanced approach in order to achieve its business goals while considering environmental impact. For example, company leaders there strive to be

- good neighbors, aware of the noises and smells that come from an active industrial work site

- good islanders, working to protect the water that surrounds their facilities
- good employers, providing employees with a safe workplace and competitive pay
- good stewards of investors' money, aiming to generate an acceptable return by operating cost effectively and profitably.

This evenhanded strategy is most evident in the manufacturer's efforts to protect the sound from pollutants, particularly copper. Copper is fairly prevalent, collecting on city streets from rain and cars. In fact, the copper content just from runoff of those streets is 10-to-12 parts per billion.

The problem is, copper in water is harmful to some fish, especially baby salmon. Thus, the business must take into consideration its several acres, which accumulate a lot of rain water, plus considerable work done on and with metal. There is clear opportunity for copper to get mixed into the rainwater, and this obviously is undesirable.

The Washington State Department of Ecology says that no more than 5.8 parts per billion of copper can be discharged to the sound. This mandate is half the amount that is in normal runoff and one of the most restrictive copper limits imposed anywhere in the United States. Through a combination of filtration processes and best practices management, this manufacturer regularly discharges its runoff to the sound with copper content of 3.0 parts per billion or less.

Achieving that goal wasn't easy; nor was it inexpensive. The operations people had to look at each of their manufacturing processes carefully and fine-tune them with extreme precision. Interestingly, this reexamination is similar to what many companies experience as they work to become lean.

Businesses face many challenges—especially in economic downturns like the one we are experiencing now. The pressure to reduce costs, be more



competitive, and protect our fragile environment can be consuming. As operational professionals, it is up to us to figure out how to balance all of these demands. Does your business take a balanced approach to sustainability?

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