



What does it mean to be green?



We spend a lot of time talking about being sustainable, and being green, but I've often been asked what that means in terms of the business reality. A good part of it is vision and ethos – we believe at Ducoterra in supporting People, Planet, and Profits. And perhaps most important, we believe that by supporting and working to benefit all three pillars that we enhance each of them as well. For example, in making sure we are being environmentally sensitive, we find that we are also invariably enhancing profits. And this does turn out to be the case.

Recently, we were discussing some changes with our metal work supplier. Most of it was routine, we were working on shifting some work that we were doing here in our facility over to them. In the course of the discussion, we started talking about waste. I've always been concerned about waste in our production processes and have taken pride in the fact that we produce very little waste at all.

It turned out that our current design was wasting a lot of the steel sheets they were cutting them out of. Because they were cut out of 48" wide sheets, and the cuts were 24.75", the remaining 23.25" were being wasted. Now, obviously, the metal shop was able to utilize some of this significant scrap for other purposes as well, such as hangar strap for ducting and the like, but it represented a significant inefficiency. As a result of that conversation, we redesigned our product, changing the sizing slightly to fit with the dimensions of the full sheet material.

So what's the net benefit that resulted from this? As a result of resizing our panels down by 3/4" of an inch, we eliminated 100% of the sheet metal wastage. We also reduced the number of cuts that had to be made, as now two panels could be cut side by side, with one shared edge done in a single cut. That meant less time on the laser. That meant less metal being wasted. And that environmental impact translated into dollars for us. We saw our costs for the metalwork drop between 25% and 40%, depending on the exact size we were looking at. That was huge for us.



Looking at saving the environment then doesn't have to be a compromise with business profitability. More often than not, rather, by seeking out ways to reduce our environmental impacts, we can also reduce our costs. A rising tide lifts all boats and, as this case clearly demonstrates, when we look to reduce our externalities, the benefits of doing so find their way back into our business either directly or through other avenues.

As of this writing, the only things we have to throw away as a result of our manufacturing activities are the stripped ends of insulation off wiring materials. Everything else is recycled. And we've been saving that insulation just to see how much waste we are generating. Over the last 12 months, we've produced approximately 6000 kilograms of heaters. The net waste stream from our shop over those 12 months? A mere 3 kg. That represents 0.05% of our final product. Put another way that means that 99.95% of the materials that come through our door used to make our heaters end up IN the heater, or recycled.

Here at Ducoterra, we take sustainability and being green seriously. Our mission is to help people save money and stop wasting energy by making a great, energy efficient heating product. And we make that product in a way that minimizes our own environmental impact. Thinking and acting consistently in this manner helps keep us focused on our vision and supports our longevity as a business. There's a lot more we do under the broad umbrella of sustainability – living wages, localized sourcing, checking on vendor environmental practices, etc... – but that's a topic for another day!