

Spec Furniture Waste Reduction

ABOUT SPEC FURNITURE

Established in 1991, Spec Furniture designs and manufactures office and institutional furniture, such as tables and seating, to customer specification. By working closely with designers and architects, Spec is able to provide seating and tables in any colour or configuration required by their customers. Spec Furniture employs approximately 100 people at its Toronto facility, and has annual sales of approximately \$25 million.



Spec's head office, located at 165 City View Drive

LOCATION

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WASTE REDUCTION - RECYCLING

Spec Furniture began its journey towards sustainability some years ago, but really stepped it up in 2009. Spec's main goal in waste reduction is waste prevention. By working with suppliers, plant staff, and purchasing, Spec is working to more accurately order the proper amount and sizes of materials to prevent over ordering and scrap accumulation. While Spec works on prevention it has to face the reality that it still creates large amounts of waste and is working towards achieving its goal of 100 per cent diversion by the year 2020. "By properly separating our waste we have increased our waste diversion from five per cent to 75 per cent in a matter of months," says Jed McKie, Design Engineer and leader of environmental initiatives.

Spec Furniture implemented a solid waste management program with the aggressive target of 100 per cent diverted from landfill by 2020. The increase of diversion streams has contributed in large part to its success. For example, particle board is now separated and recycled into bedding for farm animals or burned as bio-fuel by a third party. Diversion of steel, aluminum, cardboard and shrink wrap also resulted in decreases of waste to landfill. Food waste generated on site is now collected and composted either through a vermicomposter or green cone composters, and paper

CASE STUDY

towels are separated and picked up for composting. Disposable cups, plates and cutlery were replaced with compostable alternatives.

Looking down the supply chain and working with suppliers to find waste management solutions offered more diversion opportunities. Offcuts of polyvinyl chloride (PVC) edging used in Spec's furniture are now separated and recycled by the supplier. Another example is scrap foam, which is now separated and recycled into carpet backing by the supplier.

Reutilization of excess resources has also greatly contributed to Spec's impressive progress. Plastic laminate offered an innovative reuse project – donation to the local schools, Humber and Sheridan College, for use of students in furniture programs. Excess fabric is donated to a company which makes purses and bags out of them, and overspray powder from the powder coating line is collected and reused on selected parts in products. Solid wood is separated for use by employees as firewood, and employees are given reusable stainless steel water bottles, which has dramatically reduced the use of disposable plastic bottles on site.

Reducing hazardous waste was also targeted by Spec Furniture. Spec recently made the switch to an Ultraviolet (UV) water based finishing system. This new system drastically reduced the hazardous waste and production of air emissions during and after the process, by replacing a toxic solvent with water. In 2008, Spec Furniture purchased 3840 litres of solvent for reducing and cleaning, which has now been entirely replaced with tap water.

Recognizing that these programs are only successful to the extent that they are utilized, all of these initiatives were supported by ongoing employee education. Monthly meetings are held to communicate the company's environmental goals and achievements, and employees are encouraged to create and implement environmental goals on an individual and work-cell basis. Through lean and green thinking, ongoing education, and easy to understand signage, there are high levels of employee engagement in sustainability programming.



This scrap metal recycling bin helps Spec Furniture reduce its waste to landfill



Black furniture pieces on the left were sprayed with new paint, while the silver parts on the right were sprayed with reclaimed paint, saving dollars and resources.

MOVING FORWARD

While Spec Furniture has actively reduced the amount of waste the company generates overall, it has also increased its diversion from landfill rate by an outstanding 73 per cent – from five per cent diverted in 2008 to 75 per cent diverted in 2009. This demonstrates how dedication to waste diversion has achievable and tangible results. However, they are not stopping there. Spec Furniture employees are looking towards new projects to help them achieve their 100 per cent waste diverted from landfill by 2020 goal.

Spec has started creating reusable give away bags from scrap fabric generated in its processes, and are also investigating using scrap fabric as packaging, which would replace bubble wrap and other plastics used for packaging. As well, Spec is currently striving to achieve ISO 14001 certification which requires that all environmental aspects be addressed and a plan implemented for significant impacts.

Beyond the waste generated through the manufacturing processes, Spec Furniture is also considering the waste created from its products when they are no longer needed. Spec has created a Design for the Environment program which encourages the use of recycled materials that can be easily separated for recycling at the end of the products life, as demonstrated in the picture of the recycled plastic seat seen below.

While diverting garbage from landfills and decreasing the need for fossil fuels by recycling, Spec Furniture's waste management program saved the company approximately \$15,000 in its first few months alone, and will contribute to having its products certified according to the highly stringent Business and Institutional Furniture Manufacturer's Association (BIFMA) Furniture Sustainability Standard. This is yet another example of how going green makes good business strategy.



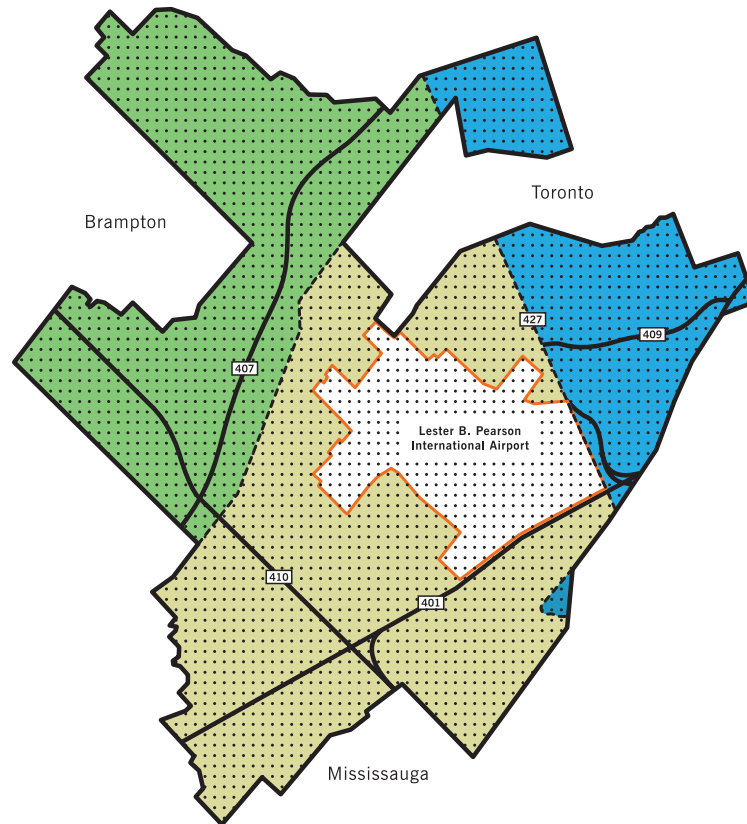
Prototype of seat made from recycled plastic

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Through new forms of business-to-business collaboration, Partners in Project Green delivers programming that helps businesses reduce energy and resource costs, uncover new business opportunities, and address everyday operational challenges in a green and cost-effective manner.

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