

25 March 2005

TEXON TAKES THE FIRST STEPS FOR STREAMLINED SUCCESS

Utilising the Lean Manufacturing philosophy, CREA, Texon's facility in China, has begun to capture the knowledge and experience of all its employees to further improve the factory's manufacturing capabilities. Opened in Foshan in April 2002, CREA produces a range of structural components such as toe puff & counter to satisfy the footwear producer's needs, including non-wovens, filmic and composite materials.

Lean manufacturing is based on the Toyota production system that seeks to eradicate waste in all its manifestations. Focussing on production processes to make all operations as lean as possible, CREA provides a foundation on which to build future improvements. The emphasis is on the participation of all employees to utilise the tools of lean manufacturing and continuously improve the value delivered to the customer.

Tools like 5-S helps to improve the working environment, and SMED, a set up reduction technique, standardises and streamlines working procedures. All operatives have been trained in the tool of 5-S and remarkable benefits have already been captured. "In its simplest form it ensures cleanliness and order in the workplace, but the simplicity of the tool is its key strength" says Plant Manager Rod Fell.

SMED has a number of benefits including increased efficiency and flexibility, increased capacity and reduced work in progress. Increasing use of this tool will help to ensure CREA is better placed to proactively plan customer requirements. As a new facility, CREA benefited immediately from an efficient floor plan, laying out the machinery to maximise the use of 4,700 square metres space. Over the years employees have identified ways of making the process and movement of materials more efficient. These savings can be used to improve product quality, delivery times and keep down costs.

Success is based on developing the right culture for change. This has been achieved by encouraging staff participation, teambuilding and the empowerment of individuals to devise ideas for continuous improvement. CREA aims to ensure that team involvement is at the core of everything they do. Those carrying out the job every day are the real experts. They are the people best placed to know how a task can be improved. Regular meetings of all staff and Kaizen improvement exercises give workers a voice and a forum for change. The strategies for dialogue between workers and management have been so successful that within the first two weeks of implementation, over 100 suggestions were received from the staff of 86, ranging from better ways to operate machines to ways of reducing waste. With the successful precedence, over US \$200,000 worth of savings is targeted for the coming year, while yields have improved by 2% over the past few months.

Training focuses on understanding the need for change and how the tools of lean manufacturing can help CREA produce high quality materials. This is to ensure employees are receptive to new ideas. The benefits of the lean manufacturing philosophy filter all the way along the supply chain to the customers and improved quality is assured. The aim now is to generate closer links to the suppliers and the

customers to identify ways of further improving the good work already carried out. Being close to customers allows Texon to listen to their needs and react to those requirements. Being close to suppliers allows Texon to work together to identify savings that can be passed on to the customers.

Texon is the manufacturer of high quality and high performance structural component solutions for the global footwear industry. Apart from CREA in China, it has manufacturing facilities in Europe & America. The manufacturing plants, together with its sales organizations, distributors and technical support teams, work in partnership with customers to create innovative solutions in over 90 countries.