



Success Story: Columbia Forest Products

<http://columbiaforestproducts.com>



North America's Largest Producer of
Hardwood Plywood Embraces Lean Initiative

Profile

Location: Mellen, Wisconsin
Headquarters: Portland, Oregon
Years in Business: 100
No. of Employees: 250
Products: Decorative hardwood veneer used in wall paneling, cabinet and furniture manufacturing
NWMOC Projects: Lean 101; Value Stream Mapping; 5S Implementation



Before 5S implementation

Situation

This plant in Mellen, Wisconsin, has operated on its current site for 100 years, the last 6 years as part of Columbia Forest Products. The plant employs 250 full-time employees in the production of decorative hardwood veneer for hardwood plywood that is used to manufacture wall paneling, cabinets, and furniture.

Project

After an initial assessment, NWMOC project advisors conducted a Lean 101 event to familiarize management and production employees with the advantages of a pull manufacturing system over that of a push system. A class of 5S methods precipitated several 5S events, resulting in a more orderly and user-friendly workplace. The Value Stream Mapping project prompted thought-provoking discussions on how to reduce the nonvalue-added time elements of the internal process. A Lean Leader has been identified and will attend the NWMOC Lean Certificate Program in the coming months. This Lean Leader will help the facility continue with the lean initiatives that have been implemented so far. The plant's Project Engineer is also spearheading, as a personal project, a method with the potential to greatly reduce internal inventories and turnaround time.

Larry Carlson, Plant Manager at Columbia Forest Products, encapsulated the experience by saying: *The Principles of Lean Manufacturing training was the best training and simulation that I have ever attended. This training really opened our eyes to the power of Lean Manufacturing.*

Results

- Created a more orderly work environment
- Increased productivity
- Gained employee enthusiasm
- Reduced inventory by 5%
- Raised employee satisfaction levels
- Increased cash flow
- Retained 5 full-time employees
- Invested over \$50,000 in employee training



After 5S implementation