Press Release

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University of Illinois students help Pregis reduce scrap, improve safety via senior class project

Deerfield, Ill., February 10, 2009—Pregis Corp. has been able to reduce scrap by $80K annually and improve safety at its Plymouth, IN plant as a result of findings by a team of University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign (UIUC) students.

Three students from the university's Department of Industrial and Enterprise Systems Engineering participated in the semester-long senior project which is designed to expose undergrads to real-world production challenges. The objective was to find a cost-effective, safe solution for the plant's material cutting process for thicker laminates.

"We use an automatic knife on this particular line which did not perform well on thicker (16-20mm) air cushioning/foil laminates. We would end up cutting those manually which meant using a foot-long knife with a razor-sharp edge," explains Dennis Hughes, Pregis plant manager.

"Manual cuts can add as much as 6 feet to each roll because workers are trying to insure the roll isn't "under" spec. In addition to waste, there was also the scrap aspect. If the new roll isn't started properly [due to web tracking errors] it needs to be scrapped. When you remove automation from this process you end up with a solution that isn't ideal from a safety, productivity or material utilization perspective."

UIUC students Casey Roth, Cecilia Ostberg and Jeff Thomas spent the fall semester working on the project which encompassed everything from process analysis to financial implication. The students were guided by faculty advisor Jiming Peng.

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The solution ended up being two prong—a redesigned knife and modifications to the mechanical "fingers" used to advance the web.

"As a result of the research the students did, we discovered that the 'saw tooths' on the automatic knife weren't aggressive enough. The solution was to modify the serrations by deepening the valleys and raising the peaks," Hughes says.

Additionally, the "fingers" located on the bar below the knife and used to advance the web needed modification. Elongating each finger and enhancing its curvature have greatly improved material handling ability.

"The new knife was installed two months ago and is performing beautifully. We've been able to automate the process and have dramatically improved downtime, scrap and waste—in addition to our safety environment. We are very pleased with the results of this latest UIUC collaboration," Hughes concludes.

Pregis funded the project with an $8500 honorarium to UIUC as part of its ongoing commitment to providing young engineers with real-world engineering and business challenges.

About Pregis:

Pregis Corporation is a leading global provider of innovative protective, flexible, and foodservice packaging and hospital supply products. The company offers packaging and product solutions for a wide variety of consumer and industrial market segments including food and foodservice, healthcare, agriculture, automotive, furniture, electronics, construction, fulfillment, catalog and military/aerospace. The specialty-packaging leader currently operates 47 facilities in 18 countries around the world. For more information about Pregis, visit www.pregis.com.

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