

Boeing Builds Solid Focus on Environmental Awareness

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Whether they're safely stripping paint from an AH-64A Apache helicopter or creatively fighting noise pollution, the employees of The Boeing Company in Mesa, Ariz., have their sights focused on protecting the environment.

Employees are applying environmental techniques to the company's next generation of rotorcraft and military support products. Their goal: eliminate pollution before it begins and show that new technologies can be environmentally friendly -- all while logging big savings for the company and its customers.

The company's environmental programs are diverse, including everything from using low-impact chemicals to recycling efforts that turn waste into savings.

Boeing has a history of seeking innovative ways to prevent all types of pollution. It's NOTAR® anti-torque system, a no-tail rotor system that reduces noise while making flying safer for pilots and easier for maintenance teams, is one example. The MD 520N is recognized as the world's quietest helicopter.

"Our basic philosophy is to invest our resources up front to improve our manufacturing technology," said Bill Pool, manager of the safety, health and environmental affairs department for The Boeing Company in Mesa. "We'd rather do that than pay for it at the other end in the form of cleanup, hazardous waste disposal and pollution control devices."

Examples of the company's efforts to reduce pollution include:

- Using the FLASHJET® paint removal system. The company spent \$2 million to speed production of the AH-64D Apache Longbow, the world's best multi-mission combat helicopter. The innovative system eliminates a solvent-based paint stripping process. The FLASHJET system uses a combination of pulsed-light energy and low-velocity carbon dioxide pellets to remove paint from the aircraft's metal and composite surfaces. The process saves preparation time, reduces costs and retains the aircraft's payload capability.
- Developing paints that contain low amounts of solvents known as volatile organic compounds. Changing to paint that still meets strict military standards reduces air emissions that create ground-level ozone air pollution or smog.
- Replacing vapor degreasing units with water-based units to replace solvent-based technology. The new units prevent the release of 30,000 pounds of solvents from being released into the atmosphere annually.
- Creating a process to recycle in-house surplus composite material. This material previously was disposed as hazardous waste, but the company now saves money by turning these scraps into pallet rack shelves, ergonomic accessories and other usable products.
- Using environmentally friendly solvents such as acetone in many areas as a degreasing solvent. The EPA recently declared this solvent a non-pollutant.
- Eliminating methylene chloride, a suspected carcinogen, as a solvent.

Boeing also is developing a computerized system to assist design engineers in selecting environmentally friendly materials. This concept is expected to prevent potential waste and pollution during future manufacturing programs.

The company has virtually eliminated the use of ozone-depleting substances such as freon and trichloroethane from the manufacturing process.

The company has established an environmental planning and management council to provide oversight in the planning, coordination and implementation of these programs in Mesa.

"The council makes sure the company develops environmentally friendly processes which are compatible with our community goals," said Pool.

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