



Improvements potted

In San Antonio, creativity and persistence lead to a solution that helps in multiple ways

By Deborah VanNierop

The Paint Slingers are no strangers to paint or to patience. The 15-person team can apply paint to a prepped KC-135 Stratotanker in two hours and need only an additional 30 minutes to paint a C-17 Globemaster III.

But it took this San Antonio-based Employee Involvement team two years of patience and persistence to find a way to improve a common piece of equipment, a wheeled paint-pot system. The work, however, has paid off and the team has achieved a business model trifecta. “The new system reduces potential for injuries, saves money and reduces our operational impact on the environment,” said Robert Morales, second-shift paint and de-paint manager.

The team, led by Luis Flores Sr., consists of the second-shift paint and de-paint employees at San Antonio’s Global Services & Support facility. Most have been working at the facility for at least 10 years, and all were aware the old system needed to be improved.

“Trying to fill the pots was difficult,” said team member Eulalio Martinez, “because they were very tall. I had to lift the 5-gallon buckets of paint just about over my head and be very careful to make sure it all ended up in the pot.”

Additionally, the pots and connected paint hoses were cleaned with paint solvent that was then drained into buckets and consolidated in 55-gallon drums and removed from the facility as hazardous material. In 2008, the paint shop generated more than 7,000 pounds of waste (about 3,200 kilograms), which cost almost \$3,000 in disposal fees.

So, the team began talking about how the system could be improved. The discussions often became heated because everyone wanted to ensure their concerns and ideas were heard, Morales recalled. “But that was important because the team learned a lot about inclusion and diversity,” he added. “At the end of the day, we all agreed that everyone is entitled to an opinion. The team learned to be open-minded enough to find value in those opinions.”

Sketches were drawn, changes were made, more sketches, more changes, until the team felt ready to create a prototype. After contacting the system’s vendor, they continued to fine-tune

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the project and started to see what they considered a worthwhile paint-pot system.

The pot was shorter and more user-accessible. The new system also allowed for four paint hoses to be used, but unlike the old system, the hoses could be used one at a time. The hoses not in use remained paint-free, reducing the amount of cleaning solvent needed. The final improvement was a plastic liner inside the pot. “The liner eliminates the need for any solvent to be used to clean the pot,” said Flores. The liners cost less than \$1.50 each, and cleanup is easy as emptying a kitchen trash can.

“It was great to be involved with a team that benefited so many areas, especially materials and waste,” said Hope Gonzalez, a San Antonio environmental specialist. “We are continually looking for and welcome ideas that help reduce impact to our environment and help us meet our waste reduction goals.”

Companywide, Boeing is targeting 25 percent improvements in solid waste recycling rates, energy efficiency and greenhouse gas emissions intensity and has a comparable goal for hazardous waste reduction by 2012 at its major manufacturing facilities.

Before the new system, the team used 60 gallons (227 liters) of solvent while painting a KC-135 aircraft. Now they use half that amount. The team also reduced the amount of solvent used on a C-17 aircraft from 90 gallons to 40 (341 liters to 151).

But the impact didn't stop there. The team found that by reducing the amount of solvent used, the new system saves more than \$300 per KC-135 aircraft and more than \$500 per C-17. Based on the projected aircraft paint schedule, the Paint Slingers expect to see an annual savings of more than \$10,000.

However, what's more important to the team is that the customer continues to get the same great product they have come to expect. “It's great to be able to come up with ideas to save money for the company, but we really take pride in the fact that we continue to provide the best quality possible to our customer,” said team member Edward Cruz.

Despite the extended time the project took to complete, teammates agreed it was worth the effort. The San Antonio Leadership Team acknowledged that by recommending the Paint Slingers for advancement to Stage 4, the highest level of maturity an Employee Involvement team can achieve.

Looking back on the experience, the Paint Slingers have some advice to offer to other Employee Involvement teams. “Don't give up,” said Roland Lamothe, “and stay focused on the task no matter how long it takes to reach the goal.” Added Earl Evans: “There's a saying that's used pretty regularly around Texas that sums up what we did: ‘Just get-'er-done’.” ■

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PHOTOS: (LEFT) Eulalio Martinez removes a bag of paint residue from the new paint-pot system while Luis Flores Sr. opens a hazardous waste container. The duo are members of a team that improved and redesigned painting processes—and helped cut waste and costs. **(TOP)** Global Services & Support employees in San Antonio apply primer to an aircraft as they prepare it for a fresh coat of paint. **LANCE CHEUNG/BOEING**