

# Not just for the here and now

## A Case Study from Mark Wilkinson Furniture Ltd

*Sustainable furniture manufacture and good practice*

### Keywords

Sustainable timber, waste reduction, solvent reduction, energy efficiency

### Summary Detail

Mark Wilkinson Furniture pay as much attention to the environment as they do to their furniture design. They are a sustainable business employing local people, providing modern apprenticeships. They use only crop grown well managed timber and recycle and reduce wherever possible. They are committed to continual improvement and believe their role is to inspire high standards within the company, the industry and to impart their knowledge to others to keep masterful techniques of furniture making alive.

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[Eliminating waste to landfill](#)  
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### Introduction

Mark Wilkinson Furniture pay as much attention to the environment as they do to their furniture design. They are a sustainable business employing local people, providing modern apprenticeships. They use only crop grown well managed timber and recycle and reduce wherever possible. They are committed to continual improvement and believe their role is to inspire high standards within the company, the industry and to impart their knowledge to others to keep masterful techniques of furniture making alive. For their efforts they received the Sustainable Business Award 2003.

This case study looks at how, with the variety of environmental improvements Mark Wilkinson Furniture has made, the sustainability of their manufacturing processes is ensured.

### Background

Mark Wilkinson Furniture Ltd. are committed to improving the quality of their products and reducing the environmental impacts of the furniture making process. By designing and making furniture that lasts they ensure the customer receives an environmentally friendly product.

A number of schemes have been started to reduce the environmental impact of Mark Wilkinson Furniture.

### Reducing the impact

#### **Scheme 1 - Elimination of timber and cardboard waste going to landfill**

Closer co-operation with timber producers has ensured that the timber they are supplied with is produced to their requirement this has reduced wastage considerably and cut down on machining, handling and sorting time.

All wood waste is now sent for chipping and converting into chipboard. The wood itself comes from sources that where possible are Forest Steward Council, (FSC) accredited and all MDF is FSC accredited.

A large amount of packaging cardboard is handled each week. It has not been possible yet to reduce the amount the company receives so instead cardboard is now separated and sent for recycling.

The results of this scheme are 2 x 14 m<sup>3</sup> skip full of cardboard once a week and 1 x 40 m<sup>3</sup> skips of wood every week go to be recycled. Recycling is cheaper than landfill.

#### **Scheme 2 – Solvent reduction**

The installation of a new spray line which only uses water based finishes has reduced the need to use traditional solvent based alternatives. This reduces the Volatile Organic Compounds to an insignificant level and makes a better working environment. It is good for the consumer as well. The line reclaims most of the overspray for reuse and produces a finished item in a fraction of the time and of a consistently higher quality.

**Other Schemes** - Employees come from a local catchment area and cover a wide age group (learning school leavers to highly skilled retired) with 15-20 apprenticeships. There is continual training for staff from H&S to personnel development. The following schemes help to ensure all employees can commit to reducing the environmental impact of the company: -

- Internal cycle parking.
- Delivery vehicles – loading is optimised.
- Switch off stickers on all equipment, energy efficient lighting in warehouse, lighting sensors to be fitted.

## **Future Improvements/ Initiatives**

The projects carried out by Mark Wilkinson Furniture have resulted in a significant reduction of their environmental impact. The following details some of the company's future improvement activities: -

- Identify further opportunities to remove materials from the waste stream
- Encourage more cycling to work. A cycle storage facility has already been built and other facilities are on stream
- Implement further energy efficiency initiatives to reduce manufacturing costs
- An environmental policy is in development.

## **Conclusion**

Mark Wilkinson Furniture Ltd have put considerable effort into reducing their environmental impact. This has resulted in considerable savings in a short space of time. They employ locally and ensure training is a vital part of the job and that skills are passed on from generation to generation. Environmental improvements benefit employees by improving the quality of their work environment.

The customer benefits in terms of well constructed furniture which contributes to a sustainable future.

**The Operations Manager David King says: -**

*“These projects have all required an investment in time, money and energy which we feel is necessary to maintain a thriving business. While the prime objective was to further our environmental policies we found that the payback times made real commercial sense.”*

## **Contact information and other detail**

David King  
Operations Manager  
Mark Wilkinson Furniture Ltd

Overton House  
27 High Street  
Bromham  
Wiltshire  
SN15 2HA

Telephone: +44 (0) 1380 850004

Fax: +44 (0) 1380 850184

[info@mwf.com](mailto:info@mwf.com)

[www.mwf.com](http://www.mwf.com)

**Type of Business:** Furniture Manufacture

**No of employees:** 270

**Turnover:** £20M