

TECHNOLOGY SPOTLIGHT

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Innovation - Let's Spark Change

Innovation is usually defined by technology but let's remember it can be found in business practices, models and behaviors. As time passes, we usually follow paths of least resistance or what is easy - we don't want to change the status quo. Within this unprecedented economy, most organizations are faced with budget constraints, layoffs and/or hiring freezes; however, these times can also bring creativity out in all of us. In order to bring change to an organization though, we must challenge our thinking and those of our colleagues. We have to become creative to move the pendulum for organizations - become the agents of change. Let's be sure that we are not just changing to change but rather we are providing change and solutions that bring savings, an upgrade from an old process or efficiency.

As we all know, fire safety is vitally important to all university and college campuses. As leaders on campus or those who are involved in products and services of campus fire safety, we need to step back and evaluate how we can offer innovation within this critical environment. A good example of this creativity and agent of change is Sue Petrisin, CFPS, CHRS, Administrative Associate - Construction, Maintenance & Interior Design at Michigan State University. Michigan State University had been using metal waste baskets within the residence halls for decades. While metal-construction wastebaskets provide good fire resistance, the downside is the manufactured seam. The seam allows the wastebaskets to leak any liquid waste onto the floor. Depending upon the liquid this can cause damage and become a hazard. Further, the metal wastebaskets rusted and had to be replaced often.

Michigan State recognized an opportunity for change and evaluated plastic fire resistant wastebaskets - yes, plastic. MSU found the Thermoset designed and manufactured wastebasket and has begun replacing the former metal wastebaskets. This wastebasket does not smoke and burn like soft plastic wastebaskets nor does it leak and rust like metal wastebaskets - most importantly they are recognized and Classified by UL.



This change by MSU has not only lowered the per unit cost and increased the in-service time of the wastebasket, it has the added advantage of being aesthetically pleasing.

Sue Petrisin of Michigan State University relates why MSU is using the fire resistant wastebaskets, "*We are using the round metal trash receptacles in our student rooms and have found over time not only do they rust and dent easily, but they can leave a metal stain ring on the floor. In addition to providing a higher level of fire safety, the wastebaskets have helped us reduce preventative maintenance costs due to rusty and bent cans. Additionally they provide better blend with our room furnishings. As we replace the round trash cans, we are using the Fire Resistant wastebasket as our preferred product.*"

Another opportunity for change within the residence housing is to provide Fire Resistant wastebaskets to students. Unlike MSU, who provides fire resistant wastebaskets in their housing facilities, many universities provide thermoplastic (non-fire resistant) wastebaskets, while other universities do not provide wastebaskets in the housing facilities at all, and instead direct the students to 'bring a wastebasket with them'. Question we have to ask: Are the students bringing the 'right-size' container for the room? Is the refuse going where it belongs if it is not the right sized container? What materials are they bringing into the residence halls?

As Paul D. Martin outlined in the August 2008 issue of Campus Fire Zone, *"these polyethylene containers ... have the same fuel value as that of gasoline ... such polyethylene containers are ignited, they rapidly become flaming, flowing and spreading liquids."*

The problem then becomes --- how do Universities fund an item not currently being provided? The innovative solution becomes to provide fire resistant wastebaskets to the students and increase the student fees for the upcoming year. A wastebasket that has been designed, manufactured and tested to meet UL standards for fire safety. The cost to the university would be \$ 6 - 12 --- the fee could range \$ 15 - 20 --- the university could cover the cost of the wastebasket and the administrative costs of coordinating the solution. Thus, the student's nominal increase in fee is insignificant compared to the fire prevention improvement.

Another idea is to challenge manufacturers and suppliers of fire prevention products and services with problems and to develop new ideas, inventions, solutions, and more ... This proactive relationship between The Center for Campus Fire Safety, colleges and universities, fire safety associations and suppliers will enhance the future of product development of fire prevention products and foster a continuous innovation pipeline thereby improving the future of campus fire safety.

This should be our goal for 2009 and beyond --- Innovation - let's spark change!

Article co-authored by Stan Pilat, Director of Sales and Marketing for Mar-Bal, Inc. and Ron Poff, New Business Development Manager for Mar-Bal, Inc. Stan and Ron have over 45 years of combined experience in sales, new product development, project management and manufacturing. Founded in 1970, Mar-Bal, Inc. is a leading thermoset manufacturing company in the United States with UL listed materials and fire resistant products including the Fire-Gard™ Waste-Safe™ wastebaskets.



Information on the UL Classification and facts to be aware of:

This UL Classification covers portable containers intended for the temporary storage of wastepaper.

They have been Classified as to their ability to contain burning paper and to withstand small external fires resulting from the ignition of one and two lbs of shredded paper without contributing to the fire.

Additional information is required to be printed on the product -

"NONMETALLIC WASTEPAPER CONTAINER ONLY, AS TO ABILITY TO CONTAIN BURNING PAPER WITHOUT CONTRIBUTING FUEL TO THE CONTAINER CONTENTS"

Note that this product is "fire resistant" not "fireproof".

See the listing for this type of product on the UL web site:
<http://www.ul.com>