

“It’s Working”: Maintenance, EHS Manager Talks Sustainable Successes at Hutchinson

As energy efficiency becomes a central focus in manufacturing, Hutchinson isn’t just talking the talk—we’re walking the walk. At our Ithaca facility, recent initiatives aimed at reducing energy use and emissions are already delivering tangible results. We sat down with Donald English, the plant’s maintenance manager and environmental health and safety manager, to learn how the team’s practical, data-driven approach is shaping a more sustainable future—one smart decision at a time.

Q: We’re looking at Hutchinson’s GHG Trends Analysis for 2024. How do these numbers represent the progress the company’s made toward its sustainability goals?

A: I can tell you that 2024 was a banner year for projects. At our Ithaca plant, our 2030 greenhouse gas goal was 50% carbon neutrality, and we’ve actually hit that already. We got there in October or November, which is outstanding. And you can see that it just keeps going down. So, we’re really in the groove on sustainability. Our ISO 50001 energy team and everyone in the plant are involved in saving energy. And it doesn’t have to be an official project. It could be just getting smarter about turning on and off equipment, and even lights. It’s these types of things that have led us to continue to actually be able to drop our numbers.



Q: In addition to the trends analysis, you have project charters. What are these about?

A: Yes, we now create these for any project. For example, we’ve determined that our air compressor is running at a higher PSI than it needs to, and we’re going to get that down. I will write a project charter that answers key questions—what’s the expectation? What are the roadblocks? Who’s going to help with the tasks? It’s also a place to lay out metrics and record milestones on the way to project completion. The charter seems to be a good tool, and it also serves as documentation necessary for air audits.

Q: Of projects completed in 2024, is there one that stands out in terms of success?

A: The dust collector. That project is a super win, because it encompasses sustainability and energy savings as well as safety. All presses now have motorized dampers on them for ventilation. If the press is off, the damper shuts, allowing the vacuum to draw from the running presses only. The main dust collector motor is 125 hp with variable speed control, so the motor only works as hard as needed for the number of presses running. This has had a positive impact from a safety standpoint because the operator standing there is getting better ventilation. And in terms of energy savings, we’ve reduced our usage by two-thirds, so it was really a win on all fronts.

Q: Your department has recently begun a new program with Consumers Energy. What does that involve, and what benefits are you seeing?

A: Part of the allure of this program was consumers put a meter on the transformer out here, and they put a portal on my computer so I can watch the plant in real time. I can actually watch the power reduction, and I'm not even anywhere near the building. And it's creating a graph, which I can print out. I can say, "Look, this was from 7:00 Sunday night until 7:00 Monday morning, and look at the spike. What did we do to make this happen, or what didn't we do?" It's been a great tool to illustrate activity in real time and plan for changes based on that.

Q: Do you feel that having this system in place has empowered employees themselves? Team leaders and those actually operating the machinery?

A: Absolutely, that's how I view it. Because I can pull these sheets, a big 11-by-17 sheet with this big graph on it, and say, "Look, this was last night. We really don't need this running until 3 a.m." We see where we can stagger the usage. And every Friday I get word from the team leaders. That's where we've got that communication going now. We've been embracing it and trying to get everybody thinking like that, and it's working.

Q: Can you talk about the cost savings aspect of the program? What incentives does Consumers Energy offer?

A: We actually participate in two different rebate opportunities with Consumers. One is known as Demand Response. How that works is you submit a plan outlining how many kWh you can drop during a specified period of time, typically in the middle of summer when energy usage tends to be high. During that time, Consumers may call you and declare an "event day." That's your cue to deploy your plan as contracted, and they reward you by taking that amount right off your bill.

The other incentive is their air audit, which is one reason we started the project charters. Consumers will come in and look for areas where equipment may be leaking compressed air and help you plan a project to address it. Then, they assess the improvement through their meters and issue a rebate for the difference. We actually didn't get much this year because we're getting so good at eliminating or minimizing leaks, which is the whole incentive. It was our best audit ever. When you add up the day-in, day-out savings from energy efficiencies, that's the real win. Any rebate is just icing on the cake.

Q: Looking at the difference just a year has made, it seems like you've become quite the expert in sustainability. What's next for operations?

A: I'm not a specialized person for energy reduction by any stretch. But I've been in the maintenance management position for most of my career, and I believe all my experience has helped me drive this initiative. It seems like things just keep coming together. We've hit most of the low-hanging fruit, I think, but we continue to see things. I can't tell you exactly what the next projects are going to be, but we're watchful and we have ideas. We've got plans. And we're just going to keep going.



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