

Vantage **Plastics** Wins National Award (Sept. 12, 2009)

Standish plastic company uses waste heat to warm office, wins national award

By Jeff Kart | The Bay City Times
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STANDISH -- Employees at Vantage Plastics in Standish were just trying to save a few bucks by using the waste heat from their equipment.

They devised a system that uses radiator water from engines that drive vacuum pumps and air compressors to heat the company's 5,000-square-foot front office in the winter.

The U.S. Department of Energy noticed, and gave the company a Save Energy Now award last week for "exemplary energy saving accomplishments."

Vantage Plastics makes plastic packaging for automotive and consumers products, along with sleds, kiddie pools and bodies for kayaks, paddle boats and golf carts.

The company has about 100 employees and uses natural gas-powered pumps and compressors to run thermal forming equipment that makes the items. Water heated by the machines is pumped to a system of pipes below the office floor.

"It saves money and it's just a good thing to do," said Paul Aultman, company president.

A company engineer came up with the idea and installed the system a couple of years ago, said Darrell Tiedeman, Vantage Plastic's vice president of sales and marketing.

It's saving about 7.5 percent in energy costs per year, or about \$500 a month in the winter.

"It works well," Tiedeman said of more-efficient heat that now warms up the office. "You can't tell the difference."

Once in a while, the company has to turn on its normal furnace - Michigan winters can be brutal - "but for the most part, it does a pretty good job," he said.

The company worked with University of Michigan experts on designing the system, and having the energy savings verified through an assessment.

Vantage Plastics, in business for 13 years, is now shooting for another award, or at least more energy savings.

"I think our next step is to see how we can start making our own electricity," Tiedeman said.

The company has an expansive roof at its 77,000-square-foot manufacturing facility, and hopes to install rooftop solar panels, depending on how much electricity could be generated.

Officials plan to seek government grants or low-interest loans to help offset installation costs.

Vantage Plastics was one of five Michigan companies to be recognized last week.

The others were Benlee Inc. of Romulus, Barnard Manufacturing of St. Johns, Flex-N-Gate Corp. of Royal Oak and Metal Technologies Inc. of Ravenna. Six other awards went to companies in Illinois, Indiana and Ohio.

Tiedeman and Aultman received their award from Michigan Gov. Jennifer Granholm at a ceremony in Detroit as part of a Midwest Industrial Energy Efficiency Exchange conference.

As part of its Save Energy Now program, the Energy Department works with private companies to improve their energy efficiency and demonstrate profitable business models that can expand markets for new energy technologies.

Industry consumes about a third of all energy used in the United States, with a large portion of the energy lost to inefficiencies, according to the department.

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