

CAUTION: ECO-FRIENDLY CARPETING FOR DESIGNERS AND CONSUMERS

By Lisa Fattori

What's one to do when a client is praising the ecological benefits, smitten with the cost savings, and sitting on their fattened wallets? ...have a good answer in mind when they ask "Why weren't we using InterfaceFLOR carpeting before?"

Interface's wholly-owned subsidiary, InterfaceFLOR Canada, Inc. (IFC Canada) is a major contributor to the company's 12-year success story on the path to sustainability. Since 1982, InterfaceFLOR Commercial (IFC) has successfully grown its manufacturing, sales and after-sales service operations from its Belleville, Ontario headquarters. Today, the company is responsible for numerous innovations in both product and process development, which support all aspects of Interface's sustainability vision.

InterfaceFLOR Commercial's sustainability culture is instilled in all aspects of the company's operations, from internal assessments of product lifecycles to the environmental impact of its employees, suppliers and customers. The company's introduction of solution dyed fibres, advanced tufting machines and foam treatments for stain resistant products, as well as the elimination of traditional printing processes, has enabled IFC Canada to reduce water intake by 95 per cent since 1994, and to significantly reduce emission stacks. The facility has also eliminated the use of any NPRI listed toxic compounds as raw materials for manufacturing its products.

In 2003, IFC introduced the i2™ collection of modular products that are available with nondirectional designs that are inspired by nature. The products have mergable dye lots and they greatly reduce installation waste. On average, the waste for a nondirectional i2 installation is 1.5%, compared to 4% for traditional modular installations, and as much as 14% for broadloom installations.

IFC is working closely with suppliers to develop more opportunities for integrating renewable resources into its products. The company now offers a number of products containing bio-based fibres derived from polylactic acid, (PLA), a carbohydrate based polymer derived from corn. More than 25 of these "hybrid" products made from a blend of PLA and nylon fibres were introduced at the 2005 NeoCon World's Trade Fair and are now available for purchase in Canada.

Through the company's ReEntry® carpet reclamation program, IFC retrieves used carpeting with a promise that it will be kept out of landfills. The program even includes reclamation of competitors' products, given the products are compatible with IFC



processes. IFC uses reclaimed vinyl backed products as feedstock for its revolutionary GlasBac® RE backing system, thereby decreasing the need for virgin vinyl.

“More and more companies are coming on board with our ReEntry program,” says Rahumathulla Marikkar, director of technology and environment for IFC Canada. “Because of InterfaceFLOR Commercial’s efforts, many more carpet companies are now talking about the environment. We’ve raised the bar significantly.”

The Interface companies in North America have diverted more than 85 million pounds of carpet from landfills through ReEntry since 1995. In 2005, 18 million pounds was diverted from landfills and was used in recycling (71%),

energy capture and conversion (28%), or repurposed (1%).

More than 2.2 million square yards of GlasBac RE have been sold since 1996, keeping millions of pounds of vinyl out of landfills and in the technical loop. Nearly 423,000 square yards of GlasBac RE were produced in 2005.

In October 2005, IFC introduced the Cool Blue™ backing process, which enables the company to reduce its dependence on petroleum. The process decreases the amount of virgin vinyl needed to make carpet and increases the amount of GlasBac RE that can be produced. Using advanced thermoplastic technology, Cool Blue increases the total potential recycled content of certain products backed with GlasBac RE to as

much as 74% (31% post-industrial). Cool Blue also gives IFC the flexibility to explore other recovered or renewable materials for future input.

IFC’s best selling modular carpet product is Entropy®, a product in the i2 collection. Entropy products manufactured in Canada now come standard with a high recycled content, solution-dyed nylon 6,6 yarn called Blue Chip™. This development enables IFC Canada to provide the highest recycled content contract carpet available in the industry.

IFC is also using Simulated Sample Technology (SIMs) as a tool for reducing waste in the sampling process, while enhancing the experience for customers who now have “view in room” capabilities online. IFC’s online product

catalog enables customers to use the SIMs technology to see products installed, without having to order physical samples, which saves time (financial waste) and materials (physical waste). After using the online product catalog to create design options, the customer receives a paper version of the sample swatch for review. While IFC's use of this technology is still quite new, the company has seen measurable reductions in the number of tufted samples that it has to ship, especially with custom orders.

From the social perspective, Interface associates are encouraged to "walk the talk" by participating in various environmentally focused initiatives. IFC Canada encourages employees to find alternate transportation to work, including car pooling and biking. In fact, the company provides its employees with a no-interest loan for the purchase of a bicycle.

"This is our way of showing that we care and want to avoid those emissions," Marikkar says. "The facility's 81 employees save more than 15,000 km per year, through the use of alternative transportation."

IFC associates in the U.S. have the option to participate in the Cool Co2mmute™ program. Employees can purchase trees, which are planted by American Forests, to offset the carbon emissions associated with their personal vehicle usage. Cool Co2mmute participants in the U.S. have purchased more than 3,200 trees since 2002. This program has been rolled out progressively across various business units in the U.S., and implementation is also planned for employees in Canada. Interface, Inc. also plants trees to offset the carbon dioxide emissions associated with business air travel for its associates, worldwide, through its Trees for Travel™ program. More than 62,000 trees have been planted in that program since 1997.

In 2002, Interface, Inc. also introduced the Cool Fuel™ program, encouraging employees in the U.S. to use Cool Fuel cards to purchase fuel for their company vehicles or fuel allowance. Interface receives a corporate rebate from its fuel provider based on gallons purchased and the rebates are invested in the purchase of emission reduction credits that are third party certified by the Climate Neutral Network. *HE

