



Tyvek® Rx

Cost-conscious Medline Sees the Value of Tyvek®

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Even health-care manufacturers competing on cost realize the value in using packaging of Tyvek® brand protective material, according to Medline Industries, Inc. Based in Mundelein, IL, Medline is the largest privately held manufacturer and distributor of health-care supplies in the United States. Well known for being cost-conscious, Medline switched from medical-grade paper headers to Tyvek® for its line of custom sterilized products — a switch that has paid off in many ways over the past two years. Since switching to Tyvek®, Medline has seen a reduction in product lead time, rejects, rework costs and product returns, while seeing an improvement in customer satisfaction.

"We work within a competitive industry," says Terry Alwin, Director of Quality, Sterile Procedural Trays Division. "Medline has a strong reputation for working with our suppliers to obtain the highest quality materials at the lowest possible cost." Despite the higher cost of Tyvek® compared to paper, Medline switched to headers made of Tyvek® for bags holding its custom sterilized products.

Previously, Medline used 45# medical-grade paper headers for its Sterile Procedural Trays Division, which supplies convenience packs to medical customers.

These packs are used in hospitals and surgical suites, so it is essential that the products maintain sterile integrity.

"With the paper headers, we were seeing holes, punctures and a high number of rejects," says Alwin. "We were rejecting finished goods and sending a lot back for rework. This was adding dollars to the cost and additional days or weeks to the lead time for producing our products." The medical-grade paper headers would get punctured or accidentally torn by operators in the plant, during shipping, or by the end user.

In addition to the internal problems caused by finished-goods rejects, there was the issue of customer satisfaction and company reputation. Maintaining the company's image of reliability and quality generated extra costs for

replacements and returns. With the growth in the volume of business, the costs associated with paper rose. In 1998, Medline made the switch to Tyvek®.

"There was a drastic reduction in the number of rejections for header related issues," says Alwin. "Now it's about one every year. Tyvek® is a lot more forgiving — it takes the wear and tear of handling during processing and customer usage better than paper."

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The reduction in header rejects is illustrated in Table I.

The support of Medline's supplier of sterile packaging products, Pechiney Plastic Packaging, Inc., was instrumental in their successful switch to header bags of Tyvek®. "We have worked with Medline for the past 12 years to develop the highest quality sterile header bags for custom procedural trays," says Mark McAnallen, Sales Representative and Account Manager for Pechiney Plastic Packaging, Inc.'s brand of Kenpak™ products. "Our objectives, with the switch to Tyvek® were to maximize breathability, puncture resistance and tear resistance, thus improving Medline's customer satisfaction.

"We found that uncoated Tyvek® and our patented Kwikkbreath™ Window header bag technology best met those objectives. As a result, Medline has attained the highest possible breathability along with a durable, puncture-resistant barrier that protects their heavy custom procedural trays."

For Medline, the benefits of Tyvek® have justified its higher initial cost compared with medical-grade paper. Since the switch to Tyvek®, the hole-in-header problem has virtually disappeared, with the associated benefit of fewer rejections, which has decreased lead time and rework costs. Customer satisfaction has increased as well.



"Complaints regarding header issues have reduced significantly," says Alwin. This has reduced associated replacement and credit costs.

All of this has contributed to increased satisfaction for Medline. "The report data speaks for itself," says Alwin. "It was definitely worth the initial expense to bring Tyvek® on board."

Table I

Reduction in Header Rejects After Switching To Tyvek®*				
	1997	1998	1999	2000
January	20	23	0	0
February	12	38	1	0
March	10	35	0	0
April	9	27	0	0
May	11	9	0	0
June	13	9	0	0
July	12	8	0	0
August	11	0*	0	1
September	6	0	0	0
October	19	0	0	0
November	24	0	0	0
December	16	0	0	0
Totals	163	149	1	1

*In August 1998, Medline switched to bags with headers of Tyvek®.

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