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# Distribution Center MANAGEMENT

Managing people, materials and costs in the warehouse or DC

## Material Handling

### DC saves \$8,000 and the environment with rubber bands

U.S. Foodservice's Fort Mill, South Carolina, DC has found a creative way to stretch its dollars: by replacing plastic shrink-wrap with large, reusable rubber bands.

The DC had been using clear plastic wrap to secure food products for years. But, like many DCs today, it was looking for a way to cut costs.

"We were using tens of thousands of pounds of shrink-wrap in our warehouse every year to secure products on pallets while stored on racks, and we knew there had to be a more cost-effective way to manage this process," says Dan Harris, president of U.S. Foodservice-Fort Mill.

Harris says he came across the idea of using rubber bands by reading another company's stock report. He researched the idea of using rubber bands to secure smaller loads on warehouse pallets with a quick Internet search. He found the reusable rubber pallet bands at a cost of approximately \$0.89 per unit, and decided to launch a five-month pilot program to test them.

In that five-month period, the DC used 11 percent less shrink-wrap on loads and saved close to \$8,000. Not only that, but Harris says the bands had the added benefit of making the DC more environmentally friendly.

"Plastic shrink-wrap is made from petrochemicals and can only be used once," says Harris. "Rubber bands are reusable.

While we can't replace shrink-wrap in every situation, the decrease in plastic wrap use has been significant, amounting to more than 100,000 pounds of wrap per year."

#### Not your average rubber bands

The rubber pallet bands Harris chose are approximately 1/16-inch thick, 3/4-inch wide and can stretch to fit around a 4-foot by 4-foot pallet. "These are not your average rubber bands," Harris says.

Harris adds that workers in the DC prefer using the bands to shrink-wrap, as they find it saves time. Workers can grab the bands from hooks at the end of each aisle and quickly wrap them around the items on the pallet to secure them.

"It's not a mess to get to them, and we don't lose any," says Harris. "And putting a rubber band over the top layer is much quicker than shrink-wrapping it. The people who use them like them because they're quicker."

While Harris had originally estimated the life span of the bands to be six months to a year, the original bands are still in use after two years and showing no signs of wear.

"We're not breaking them, and they're holding the product," Harris says. "We haven't had to replace one yet, so I don't even know what the life span is."

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