

PACKSTRAT SITE VISIT

SOLAR-POWERED FUTURE? EFP LOOKS FOR A STELLAR ASSIST

Sunnier days are forecast for the energy bills of **Earth Friendly Products** (EFP) and its plant in Addison, IL, which has invested \$400,000 in a solar power collection system that's the largest commercial unit in Illinois. It is expected to be operational by May.

The rooftop installation by **SunHeat Solar Inc.**, which is located within a half mile of the plant, comprises 312 three-foot-by-five feet, 216-watt solar panels from **Sharp**, along with associated components and wiring. Solar energy is expected to provide 60% to 70% of the plant's overall electricity requirements. The plant includes four side-by-side packaging lines for the 150 environmentally friendly cleaning products that EFP distributes globally. These include *Ecoss* brand laundry detergent in high-density polyethylene (HDPE) jugs sold at **Sam's Club** and **Costco**.

Based on an average of four sun hours daily in the Chicago area, the panels will generate 90,000 kW of power annually. Aided by 30% in rebates and credits through state and federal incentives, the payback is calculated to be four years and could be sooner if electricity rates rise, according to vp Kelly Vlahakis-Hanks.



The move to sun power is the right thing to do, says EFP vp Kelly Vlahakis-Hanks, fronting the 312 rooftop solar panels at the Addison, IL, plant.

The use of sun power is a natural extension of the company's sustainable focus in the products' formulations (using plant-based, nontoxic ingredients), packaging, and now production operations, says Vlahakis-Hanks of the 43-year old company. "It's the right thing to do."

She also points out that the plant uses only containers sourced locally and molded from two of the most commonly recycled polymers, PET and HDPE. Also, EFP recycles 95% of its waste, such as bottles, shrink films and corrugated containers, through local companies. The goal, she says, is to attain a level of zero waste at each facility.

Vlahakis-Hanks expects the company to market its sun-powered capability through packaging graphics in 2011, after all five facilities have made the upgrade to photovoltaic power. During a late April visit to the plant, Vlahakis-Hanks disclosed that the company was looking into wind power, too.

Packaging Strategies Perspective: *Expect more organizations to follow the lead of companies like Earth Friendly Products and **Frito-Lay** (for its SunChips) to harness renewable energy sources to help power their packaging and production operations. This can save companies money over the longer term, help them fulfill their CSR missions, and also provide "hooks" to tout earth-friendly efforts on their packaging. PS*

Earth Friendly's Ecos laundry detergent.



The Addison plant's four packaging lines, along with the entire production facility, will be 60-70% solar powered. The plant is the second -- and largest -- of five EFP facilities to harness solar power.

The 104,000 sq-ft headquarters plant in the western Chicago suburbs began operations in September when the company outgrew its facility in nearby Wood Dale, IL. The plant's products ship to markets in the Midwest and Canada.

It is the second of five of EFP's plants that are using solar power, representing a total investment of \$2mn. In fact, the regional plants are part of a strategy to help keep distribution costs down while lowering the company's carbon footprint, Vlahakis-Hanks points out.