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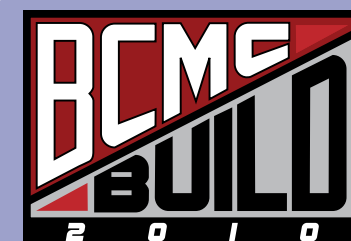
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**A fresh take on
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Editor's Message

The True Goal of Material Handling

by Steven Spradlin

It's a misnomer if you think about it. In my mind material handling is a bad thing. I don't want to handle material. I want to handle finished goods. Finished goods are the only way I make any money and keep my business going. Material handling is merely an expense that is part of the process of my throughput.

Several years ago we brought in a consultant from North Carolina who helped us take a look at our company's material handling. He made us think about how expensive it was to "handle" the materials from unloading trucks, storing raw materials, moving material to the saws, getting material away from the saws, staging material for production, moving material to the jigs, getting the material into the jigs, getting the finished product out of the jig, and finally stacking the finished products. All of the areas in some way, shape and form can be improved on a constant basis in anyone's plant—even Joe Hikel's at Shelter Systems in Maryland.

Our industry has adopted several solutions over the years that have helped in these areas. One of the most beneficial in my mind is the use of the live deck in front of the saw. Material handling in the cutting department is where we've made the most improvement I'd say. The saws have gotten so efficient in the last 15 years that most of us have gone from manual setup saws to saws that download over a wired connection. Saw setup times have gone from several minutes to a few seconds.

But even though there are many material handling solutions out there, it's common for one solution to actually become the next problem. For instance, upgrading to faster saws eventually created a tremendous bottleneck at the front of the saw, so live decks became the solution. Soon after, it became known that today's residential houses became more complex and required more truss types, which meant more setups at the saw. So getting the material to the live deck became an issue. I solved that problem with a linear picking line with a set of rollers down the middle. One drawback to the linear picking line is that it is limited in the species, sizes and grades of material you can place on it. We address the problem somewhat by stocking two grades of 2x4 and two grades of 2x6, which covers about 80 percent of the wood we need. Large cuttings are separated and placed on the live deck by forklift.

Once you get this much wood in front of the saw then you have to figure out how to get it all away from the saw. We put a live deck on the back side of the saw with a stacking rack. Then the issues became banding the materials and getting the product out of the building because the saw was so fast there was not time for any of it. We installed an autobander on a roller line that powered the wood out of the building and placed it on a roller line that allowed accumulation until picked up by a forklift.

When it is all said and done, our material handling labor entails: two people operating Cyber saws, two pickers, two catchers and one forklift driver at the end that loads materials into the roof lines. I believe that our improvement in material handling within our cutting operation has allowed us to be competitive with our competition, at least those who understand the pricing of their products. Yes, I had to throw that "jab!"

I hope you're spending less time handling materials than finished goods. I know I am! **SBC**

at a glance

- ❑ One of the most beneficial solutions is the use of the live deck in front of the saw.
- ❑ Saw setup times have improved dramatically.
- ❑ Even though there are many material handling solutions out there, it's common for one solution to actually become the next problem.

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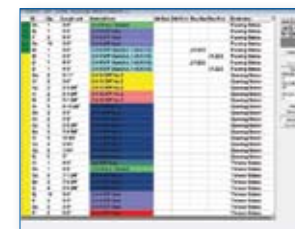


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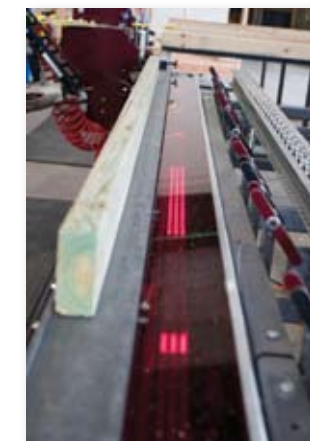


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