

# GREEN TEXTILES

## Protecting the Future

If you look around, it's likely that you'll see at least one place where hook-and-loop fasteners from the VELCRO® brand are making life simpler for you. In fact, there are probably several; the textile product is ubiquitous.

It's in the computer pouch that keeps your laptop safely ensconced during a jarring rush-hour commute. It holds your car's headliner fabric in place to ensure a quieter ride, and it keeps your sofa cushions perfectly stuffed so you can read your favorite book in comfort. From the intimacy of a child's diaper to the brute force of an armored tank (yes, it's in there, too), the VELCRO brand is in our lives more than we know.

"It's not something that people really think about," said Fraser Cameron, CEO of Velcro Companies, which owns more than 400 active patents and numerous trademarks.

The job the VELCRO brand is doing to keep our daily lives comfortable is matched by the work the company itself does to keep our environment safe.

### Growing Environmental Efforts in the U.S. and Abroad

"We've done a lot in sustainable manufacturing – long before it was fashionable," Cameron said.

From low-energy lights and occupancy sensors to processes designed to redirect waste at manufacturing facilities, Velcro Companies holds industry firsts in its sustainable manufacturing processes: first in the industry to remove solvents from coating processes,

and the first to substantially reduce the use of heavy metals in its manufacturing. Yet, this ISO 14001-certified company knew it could do more.

"Our philosophy is about making connections, and we knew that if we wanted to make amazing connections with customers, we'd have to first make connections with the community," he said. "We thought, 'Let's take it one step further.'"

That step included broadening environmental responsibilities to incorporate social responsibilities, and the company has almost completed construction of the largest charitable school in Cambodia.

Environmental efforts in the U.S. and abroad continue to grow as well. Velcro Companies now has on-site generators to capture fossil-fuel burn-off, and 98 percent of the electrical and thermal power is self-generated. Additionally, it is installing solar

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CEO, Velcro Companies

panels for energy generation. It is a company that is well on its way to meeting a self-set sustainability goal of reducing its carbon footprint by 20 percent by 2025.

Velcro Companies has 2,500 employees, including about 600 in Manchester, New Hampshire, the site of its U.S. headquarters.

"Surveys tell us sustainability is crucial to employee satisfaction," said Cameron, who describes employees as high-tenure, including some who stay with the company 40 or 50 years. "Many of our employees spend a lifetime making our product. We want to ensure the product's attributes, and the way the product is made, make them proud."

### Taking Sustainability Full Circle

Kathie Leonard knows something of company pride. She is the owner and president of Auburn Manufacturing Inc. in Mechanic Falls, Maine, just over 100 miles from Velcro Companies' New Hampshire facility.

"We've been making textiles for 36 years, and people can't believe we're in the business we're in and live happily in Maine," Leonard said of the state that she fell in love with and never left after what was supposed to be a short visit in the 1970s. "But we're good corporate citizens. We have to be. What you do – good or bad – follows you with only 1.2 million people in the state."

Auburn is a manufacturer of high-performance coated textiles and composite fabrics for extreme-temperature applications and

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Auburn Manufacturing created a kit that features the company's coated fabrics in a composite that is easy to customize – like contact paper with pre-measured squares that can be cut to size. Auburn's kit also includes hook-and-loop fasteners.

"We've provided an easy, cost-effective way for facilities to cover those components, and they're reducing their greenhouse gas emissions by up to 8 percent," she said. "It's a big movement in a lot of these institutions, for the retrofit market and new construction."

Auburn also created a similar kit with a water-vapor barrier for chilled water systems; it keeps the cold in and prevents corrosion of pipes.

"Sustainability is a way for the textile industry to show off," Leonard said. "There's a lot of knowledge and technology incorporated into textiles."

Fraser Cameron of Velcro Companies echoes the sentiment.

"What you can do with a textile product is quite extraordinary," he said. "At the core, our goal is to go beyond what people might possibly expect. We have a story of undiscovered heroes in our industry." ❧

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**Kathie Leonard**  
CEO, Auburn Manufacturing Inc.

for end-use products including welding blankets, curtains and pads. Its manufacturing is extremely efficient: the use of water-based materials for coatings offers less volatility and very little waste. Instead of sending waste fabrics to landfills, Auburn donates the remnants to welding schools for use as protective fabrics.

Auburn's sustainability story goes full circle with innovative product development that has helped the company's customers in their own sustainability efforts.

Many of Auburn's products go into insulation applications as components of other products, such as custom-made, removable insulation

covers for heavy equipment in mechanical rooms. The insulation protects odd-shaped equipment that pipe insulation can't cover.

Covering unusual shapes and sizes often requires expensive handcraftsmanship that sometimes is cost-prohibitive for institutions such as hospitals, colleges and government facilities.

Leonard describes a typical mechanical room in the basement of a building on a college campus.

"The pipes are covered, but the components are not," she said. "You're losing heat in all those places where the pipes connect, and it's rising into the classrooms and libraries from the rooms below it. It's like insulating your attic, but leaving your front door wide open."

As a result, greenhouse gas emissions – and energy costs – rise.

"Our silicone-coated fabrics are generally used on the outside of those custom products," Leonard said. "We thought, 'Why don't we help these folks make the component covers more quickly and inexpensively so they can save energy?'"