

Nuwa Textiles: The Greening of Polyester

October 03, 2008

When environmentally friendly business practices began to grow in popularity, textile maker Michael Shih decided to look at his family's nearly 40-year-old textile business to see what could be done to take advantage of the interest in all things green.

It seemed to be a tall order, since Shih's company manufactures manmade performance fabrics for the outdoor apparel market in its own factory in Taiwan and through a joint venture with mills in China.

But to Shih's surprise, he found the company was already in great shape environmentally. The factory recycles its waste water, generates its own electricity, and has reduced its carbon footprint by using energy- and water-saving equipment.

Shih credits his father with giving the company an eco overhaul—but points out that he didn't do it to be green.

"My dad is nowhere close to an environmentalist—but he's a great businessman," Shih said. "He looked at everything so efficiently. If we recycle water, we save on water bills.

"Instead of burning fossil fuels, why don't we build our own power plant that's off the grid? It's cleaner to burn, but it's also cheaper in the long run. If we have a more efficient dye machine that uses less water, that means it's less water that we have to heat up. That's an investment that's good for the company's profitability."

Last year, Shih relaunched the company as **Nuwa Textiles** to highlight the fabric mill's environmental efforts. Shih—and the company's U.S. headquarters—are based in Tustin, Calif.

"We've been in the fabric business in the U.S. for more than 10 years but not really focused on branding ourselves," Shih said. "Nuwa Textiles is a way to package ourselves and tell our story right."

Founded by Shih's grandfather, the Taiwanese mill produces more than 20 million yards of fabric each month, according to the company. Customers include **The North Face**, **Eagle Creek** and **Nordstrom**.

Although the mill produces petroleum-based, manmade fabrics, Shih said the company manufactures its recycled and new polyester and nylon fabrics "in a much more sustainable way," jokingly describing the fabrics as "organic."

Fabrics are dyed and finished in a facility near Taipei. Founded in 1984, the dyehouse is **Oekotex**-certified and has applied for **Bluesign** certification. According to company materials, the dyeing and finishing facility reuses 265 tons of water every day and fewer liters of water per kilo of fabric dyed than the industry average.

The company's weaving mills have also installed waterrecycling systems that allow the mills to reuse 70 percent of their water.

For more information, visit www.nuwatex.com. —Alison A. Nieder