

Mill: All of its products undergo rounds of rigorous testing

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The hub of No. 6 resembles a scaled-down NASA control room with monitors and technicians keeping watch over the process. Operators can make adjustment as the machine runs to make the paper thicker or stronger, Puzey said.

Once the paper, whether it’s paper towels, toilet tissue or napkins gets the thumbs up to continue on to converting, it will be subjected to another round of abusive testing.

GP tests about a dozen different properties from the time the paper is manufactured and after it’s converted, Puzey said. In addition, there are about 40 “fit-and-finish” inspections of the product before it leaves the mill.

That includes checks of the product itself and the packaging. The company checks printed graphics to make sure they’re not smeared, and workers pull packages off the line to inspect the sealing, positioning of the label and integrity of the wrap.

They open the package and check the product for anything that shouldn’t be there, embossing of the product, even cuts and good perforations.

Making the grade

Then samples are subjected to the same stretching, pulling and soaking the paper went through before it was sent to converting. That’s because the rolling, dimpling and pressing the paper goes through in converting weakens it slightly, said Rhonda Smith, quality technician.

Embossing puts a pattern on the towels that makes them softer and more absorbent, but the pressure of the rollers slightly weakens the paper, Puzey said.

“We test it again,” Smith said. “We check, check again. We not only do visuals, but we do these same tests after it’s converted.”

It’s manufactured stronger to begin with to compensate for the slight loss of strength, Puzey said.

Wauna keeps technicians working ‘round the clock testing product before it leaves the mill, Smith said.

Made at Wauna

There’s a lot to check. The miles of conveyors keep tons of paper products in motion heading toward stores up and down the West Coast. The mill’s small army — the exact number also considered a trade secret — keeps the machinery humming.

Many employees are second generation in the company and have grown up with different brands, Ward said.

Puzey said the mill’s products affect people, although they may not realize it.

“People drive by Highway 30 all the time, but ... when you go to the store to buy a roll of paper towels and you see Brawny on the shelf, it doesn’t say Made at Wauna Mill on Highway 30 at GP, and that Vanity Fair napkin you see at Safeway or whatever — we make that right here just down the road, for a lot of us.”

Ward added, “And the more customers we have the better it is for Clatsop County.”

‘The more customers we have the better it is for Clatsop County.’

— Kristi Ward
public affairs manager for the Wauna Mill



Vasily Pisarchuk checks a package of Angel Soft.



Photos by JOSHUA BESSEX — The Daily Astorian

Conveyor belts with Brawny paper towel products are seen in the Georgia Pacific mill in Wauna.

PRODUCT FAST FACTS

The Wauna Mill manufactures more than 30 million cases of bath tissue, paper towels and napkins. Sold west of the Rocky Mountains, Wauna manufactures:

- 100 percent of Brawny paper towels;
- 100 percent of MD Bath tissue;
- 75 percent of Angel Soft bath tissue;
- 75 percent of Vanity Fair napkins;
- 75 percent of Sparkle paper towels.

When Crown Zellerbach started the mill in 1965, Wauna manufactured Chiffon, Marina and Nice N Soft bath tissue. Marina bath tissue was very popular and was produced in colors including blue, yellow, green and beige, until the market changed and consumers wanted white bath tissue.

The No. 3 paper machine, which started up in 1967, produced newsprint. It was shut down in 1999.

The No. 4 paper machine, which started up in 1968, produced bond papers, freezer wrap, etc., and shut down in 2007.

The mill was purchased by James River in 1986; Wauna manufactured Aurora and Northern bath tissue.

When Fort James owned the mill in 1997, Wauna manufactured Quilted Northern bath tissue, which is still a GP brand; however, it is no longer made at Wauna.

Later when Georgia-Pacific purchased the mill in 2000, Wauna began producing Angel Soft and MD bath tissue.

The mill stopped producing the last Crown Zellerbach brand, Zee napkins, about five years ago.

The products above, and other store brands made at the mill, contribute to a \$90 million payroll. Clatsop County benefits from more than \$4.5 million in property taxes, \$13 million in wood procurement in Clatsop County and more than 4500 jobs that are indirectly created in the community. The average hourly employee rate is \$27 an hour.

Source: Georgia Pacific



A Jan. 13, 1967 issue of The Daily Astorian is shown at the Georgia Pacific mill. The mill used to produce newsprint paper but now no longer does.



Craig Baker, a rewind operator and adjuster, inspects an uncut roll of Brawny paper towels.

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