

## Soap maker cleans house

**Mt. Hood Solutions seeks to build sales with new name, focus on green products**

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Portland Business Journal — by Erik Siemers Business Journal staff writer

A 100-year-old Portland soap maker is betting big on sustainability. In February, Mt. Hood Chemical changed its name to Mt. Hood Solutions.

The company makes soaps, detergents and cleaning products for commercial and industrial customers.

This year it also moved into a larger facility in North Portland and incorporated a series of sustainable manufacturing practices. It's also using more earth-friendly source materials into its cleaning products.

"We've made a true commitment to be a really green company," said Tom Mulflur, the company's president. "We're not going to talk about it. We're going to do it."

The company expects revenue around \$24 million this year. Mulflur said that matches revenue from the previous year, but that follows a decade of revenue growth that held steady at about 8 percent annually.

The company — which employs 110, including 45 in Portland — sells 75 percent of its products to commercial customers such as hotels, restaurants, hospitals and laundries. Industrial customers buy the remaining 25 percent.

As Mulflur puts it, the company's products are used everywhere.

"We've cleaned your dishes, the floor, the table, anything in there," he said. "You don't even know we're there."

The new mission seems far removed from the company's founding in 1902 as Mt. Hood Soap Co., a regional manufacturer of consumer cleaning products which made Mt. Hood-branded bars of soap and a laundry detergent known as "C-20."

The company stopped making consumer goods when massive companies like Procter & Gamble started making them.



Mt. Hood Solutions President Tom Mulflur bought the company in 1995. It's been around for more than 100 years.

Today Mt. Hood Solutions is making another major transition.

It's a nationwide effort, with help from the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, which sets guidelines for manufacturers.

The EPA now gives "Design for Environment" designations to manufacturers whose products use safer ingredients, said Brian Sansoni, vice president of communication at the Soap and Detergent Association.

Mulflur said Mt. Hood has taken a lead in the effort, and received the new EPA designation on five of its products, with another five on the way.

"We have voluntarily reached out to make these decisions. We've led the way," Mulflur said. "We aren't the leader, but there aren't too many people in our class of company reaching out. There are more and more every day. We were one of the first."

Sansoni said that while the soap and detergent industry has historically adopted sustainable practices, the switch to cleaner source material won't be easy.

"You can't just like that switch your sourcing on a dime," Sansoni said. "At the end of the day, no matter how green you proclaim your product to be, it still has to be effective or people aren't going to use it or buy it again."



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Mt. Hood's efforts reach beyond its source materials.

The company moved this fall from a 50,000-square-foot facility at Northwest Yeon Avenue, to its new 85,000-square-foot manufacturing, warehouse and office space at 14546 N. Lombard St.

Among the new building's features: a rainwater collection system that allows the company to use captured rainwater for manufacturing.

The company is also reducing its consumption of energy and plastics and is using electric-powered forklifts and biodiesel-fueled delivery trucks.

"It's at the core of what we do," Mulflur said. "We're not doing it because it's cool to do. We're doing it because we have made it an integral part of our business to the point where we can make most decisions that are right for the environment and economically positive for us."

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