

NCMEP PARTNER HELPS FOAM MANUFACTURER REACH
QUALITY GOALS

ABOUT NORTH CAROLINA FOAM INDUSTRIES-NCFI. NCFI was organized in 1964 by research chemist Dr. H. W. Bradley and parent company Barnhardt Manufacturing Company. NCFI quickly became a leader in manufacturing flexible polyurethane foam for transportation, furniture, roofing, geotechnical and custom uses. Today NCFI's 280,000-square-foot manufacturing facility in Mount Airy, North Carolina, contributes to the growing polyurethane industry. NCFI uses the latest technology to keep up with the growing number of applications that are using polyurethane foam. NCFI has two additional locations in Dalton, Georgia, and Houston, Texas.

THE CHALLENGE. In 2017 Surry Community College provided customized training funds for NCFI to begin an ISO 9001:2015 implementation program with IES. Unfortunately, NCFI had to put the implementation on hold due to a lack of time and resources. In March 2020, Chip Holton, the president of NCFI, set an ambitious goal for the organization to finish their ISO 9001 certification in six months. NCFI was already in the medical bedding industry before the COVID-19 pandemic, but when the pandemic hit, the need for medical bedding was dire and the organization saw a chance to grow.

MEP CENTER'S ROLE. NCFI called on the aid of North Carolina Manufacturing Extension Partnership (NCMEP), part of the MEP National Network™, partner NC State Industry Expansion Solutions (IES). IES also brought in Claire Pickrell, an improvement specialist. "Getting our auditing program off the ground was a tremendous boon. The auditor came in from IES and they ran the auditing show and showed us how to audit effectively. Everything they did was by the book and they were on us to make sure we did everything right," said Steve Sanderson, quality assurance manager. From August to September 2020, IES provided NCFI with an internal audit, follow-up audits, and coaching for under \$4,680 with help from the NCMEP Emergency Assistance Program (EAP). The EAP program launched with the help of Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security Act (CARES) Act funding to support North Carolina manufacturers' pandemic response and improve their competitiveness. NCFI noticed a difference quickly. Sanderson recalled, "A month after our certification, we got audited by Costco. We're selling to Costco now, something that wouldn't have happened without an ISO certification." The certification also helped the company train employees for skilled positions, streamline manufacturing processes and make it easier to work with clients like aircraft manufacturers. Sanderson said, "We used to fill out a lot of paperwork when working with aircraft manufacturers but now that we're ISO certified, we just provide our ISO certification and we're good to go."

"IES has been fantastic. Anything we expected or needed, they were right there. The IES improvement specialist — Claire — laid out a clear blueprint for us to follow and explained why each step of the process was necessary. The professionalism and expertise they brought to the table was exemplary."

-Steven Sanderson, Quality Assurance Manager

RESULTS



25 jobs created



\$400,000 in economic impact



\$50,000 in increased sales



10-15% increase in bedding market sales

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