

Paint solvent recycling process is good business for Gage Products

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Gage Products in Ferndale won in the Green Leaders category of Automotive Innovation. Chemist Veronica Akers works on making fuel blends at a laboratory in the Gage Products Company facility in Ferndale.

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Gage Products business manager Andy Welch is in front of tanks storing raw materials and remanufactured solvent blend at the company's facilities in Ferndale. The company is celebrating its 25th year of recycling. / Photos by Ryan Garza/Detroit Free Press



Gage Products business manager Andy Welch is in front of tanks storing raw materials and remanufactured solvent blend at the company's facilities in Ferndale. The company is celebrating its 25th year of recycling.

What the leader does: After a vehicle comes through the paint shop, spent solvents and paint mixtures are recovered and sent to Gage. An evaporation process is used to separate the solvent from used paint, and the waste is delivered to cement kilns to be burned as fuel.**Web site:** www.gageproducts.com/index.html**What stood out in the judges view ?** This is fairly toxic material they are dealing with and without their tested and proven process the quantity of these solvents that would end up in landfills is frightening.

Some companies talk about how recycling is good for business.

But Gage Products is actually doing it.

The Ferndale-based company has made a living from a closed-loop recycling process for paint solvents, a technology that helps automakers reduce waste and save cash in the chemically intense process of painting cars and trucks




“It’s counter-intuitive that a company that sells solvents wouldn’t want to sell more solvent,” said Sharon Stahl, director of community relations for Gage. “We work with them to optimize and reduce the amount they use to have an effective color change (on the assembly line).”

By helping customers reduce their solvent usage, Gage sells less solvent, but retains and attracts clients who must cut costs and meet environmental regulations.

Gage recently celebrated its 25th anniversary. The recycling process evolved from the company’s relationship with Ford. Now it also works with General Motors and Chrysler.

Most cars assembled in the U.S. are painted in plants that rely on Gage’s recycling process, which reclaims about 75% of the materials used, executives said.

The system works like this: After a vehicle

 comes through the paint shop, spent solvents and paint mixtures are recovered and sent to Gage. An evaporation process is used to separate the solvent from used paint, and the waste is delivered to cement kilns to be burned as fuel.

The remaining solvent is distilled, which removes water and various contaminants. After virgin solvents are added to the blend, the remanufactured solvent blend is sent back to the assembly plant, where it’s reintegrated into the paint process.

Gage officials estimate that its process has saved 750 million pounds of waste from landfills and prevented 1.5 billion pounds of carbon emissions from escaping into the atmosphere. The company estimates it has reused 10,000 tons of solvents.

“Before it was one-time use,” said Andy Welch, Gage business manager. “Now it’s used multiple times.”

The process also helps assembly plants meet federal emissions standards.

Gage, which has about 80 employees in Ferndale and another 40 at other locations, was founded in 1936 as a distributor for Shell gasoline.

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