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Jo Bird & Co Ltd, a leading international designer and manufacturer of fire and safety product storage solutions for protecting fire and safety equipment in offshore, marine, industrial and commercial locations, has been accredited to BS EN ISO14001.

The company is celebrating becoming one of the first small manufacturers in the West Country to achieve this internationally recognised environmental management system standard. Its two major brands, Firebird and ToughStore, are internationally recognised for their class-leading design and performance. Manufactured in Somerset, UK, around 50 percent of Jo Bird's products are supplied to customers outside the UK through a network of distributors.

ISO14001 is the only standard in the ISO14000 series certifiable by an external certification authority and required the company to demonstrate its environmental credentials -- which it did by making considerable savings in its use of energy through more efficient production management.

It has also achieved significant reductions in its levels of general waste disposal and manufacturing raw material wastage. By finding ways to recycle a variety of wastes the company's disposal costs have dropped by as much as 40 percent in recent months.

Practical examples of efficiency measures range from placing light pipes in the offices to increase the use of natural light and reduce electricity usage to replacing compressed air piping and reducing its length to reduce loss of pressure thereby reducing energy consumption.

The company has also made a measurable shift towards a more sustainable business model through, for example, using more local products in its processes. It has also adopted the use of more environmentally friendly business practices to reflect a move towards meeting the needs of a changed economic climate.

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In adapting, Jo Bird has reaped the benefits of lower costs and improved profitability and has seen its improved competitiveness generate growth, particularly in its international business, during the last year. Today, the company exports around 30 percent of its product sales direct to export markets with a further 20 percent supplied indirectly through appointed distributors.



The ISO 'green team' (from left) Clive Chappell (research & development), Joanna Rees (purchasing assistant) and Paul Manktelow (production manager).

Commenting on this achievement, Jo Bird's managing director Guy Atkins said: 'We have long held the view that independent assessment and accreditation to international standards have been beneficial to us in opening up new markets in which we can compete for new business. Achieving ISO14001 demonstrates that we are serious about our long-term future as a sustainable business. It further supports our business development activities in a similar way that quality standard BS EN ISO9001, which we achieved 10 years ago, has done'.

He added, 'Our accreditation has also already proved its value as a marketing tool. Whilst in Manila recently we greatly improved our chances of success as a result of having ISO14001 accreditation to demonstrate our environmental commitment. It gives us a vital competitive edge.

'We see it as a form of enlightened self-interest which in the long run not only saves us money but makes us leaner and more attractive as a supplier. So pleased are we with the improvements we have already achieved, we now have 'green' teams in various departments constantly thinking about ways we can become more efficient. I think we can accurately describe ourselves as having become addicted to the environmental and lean manufacturing culture, as we can clearly see the benefits throughout the business'.