



## Filtering Out Inefficiencies: How Bar Code Automation Streamlined Operations

### Who is EP Minerals?

EP Minerals, LLC is a worldwide leader in diatomaceous earth (DE), clay and perlite. These unique minerals are used as filter aids, absorbents and functional additives serving dozens of diverse markets around the world including food and beverage, biofuels, swimming pool, landscape, sports turf, automotive, paint, plastics and agriculture.

DE is used in applications such as medical masks for filtration, in air filters for A/C units, pharmaceuticals, insecticides and in the purification of waste water and petro-chemicals. Granular clay is used extensively in the automotive industry, in cat litter, oil spill removal and for sports fields, and perlite is used in filtration, construction, building materials and other industrial applications.

### The Situation

Product is manufactured and stored in one of seven warehouses with hundreds of bays (inventory locations). Their manufacturing business processes were largely manual, generating pre-printed labels and manually applying them to finished goods being stored in warehouses. This effort consumed valuable labor hours, considering they move nearly 500 tons of material each day and were printing hundreds (and even thousands) of labels each week. If one of their label printers failed, or the label material jammed in the printer, it meant downtime for the production line and delayed shipments for its customers.

Manually handling the label process was labor-intensive, but an even bigger issue was being able to quickly find and track inventory. In any industry, missing inventory means lost dollars; for EP Minerals, they had a lot of places inventory could hide. Their outdoor storage area was poorly labeled. If product was missing, the likelihood of finding it was slim.

Most product was bagged and palletized, with bagged product having one set of part numbers, and palletized product having another set. If a customer ordered a quantity that didn't exactly match what was already palletized, they would make up new product vs. using existing inventory. For this manufacturer, starting and stopping production runs cost thousands of dollars per hour.

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## The Solution

Barcom's solution gave EP Minerals an effective way to create part numbers to make order fulfillment easier. "We literally couldn't pack a 75-lb. order, even though we had a 25 and a 50 sitting there," said Jeff Scott, Continuous Improvement Director. "Barcom gave us a way to dynamically fulfill orders from product already made," added Scott.

Barcom integrated the inventory tracking solution with EP Minerals' existing ERP system, using Barcom's own transACTION software. Prior to that, no one had success integrating with their ERP, and their previous vendor wanted a hefty sum to put a system together for them. Barcom not only connected the two tools, but was able to configure it so the two systems could collaborate in real-time. "Being able to work seamlessly with our ERP system was huge for us," said Scott.

## The Result

The Lovelock, Nevada plant achieved their goal of increasing inventory accuracy and reducing the time to load finished products. Each pallet (or bulk bag) receives a unique bar code read by portable scanners on each forklift. As product moves through the plant, the pallet is scanned to identify location. This information provides an accurate and real-time record of who put what pallet where. The location of all plant inventory can be viewed at any time. They can also report on quality status of each pallet and where pallets are for a specific truck — all tied into their ERP system.

Substantial financial and operational efficiencies were realized in under two years. The biggest benefit has been a reduction in labor hours per load of product by 20%. They've also been able to reduce late shipments by 18%, due to the ability to find product in the right location.

Customer satisfaction is a high priority for EP Minerals, so they were pleased to see a reduction in customer complaints due to an increase in on-time shipments and orders being fulfilled correctly. To further ensure the right product is leaving their dock, the system automatically takes an image of each load eliminating what was once a very manual process. "Barcom is always there for us, even now that the project is complete," said Scott. "If one of our sites needs a programming change, whether it's minor or significant, Barcom is always responsive," he added.

### TOTAL SOLUTION BENEFITS

- ROI achieved in under 2 years
- Improved organization of the work site
- Increased worker safety
- Satisfied customers

### BARCOM'S INVENTORY SOLUTION

- Cisco wireless infrastructure
- Honeywell CK71 handheld computer
- Honeywell PM43 bar code label printers
- transACTION Enterprise Version

**Are manual processes causing profits to fly out the loading dock door? We can help you achieve cost savings goals while improving the safety and overall quality of your environment.**

**CONTACT US TODAY TO SCHEDULE A PRELIMINARY EVALUATION OF YOUR OPERATION.**

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