CEILING RECYCLING PROGRAM IS PERFECT PRESCRIPTION TO HELP PFIZER MEET ITS COMMITMENT TO THE ENVIRONMENT

As Part of the Ongoing Renovation of its New York City Corporate Offices, Pharmaceutical Company Recclaims Old Tiles Rather Than Dumping Them

Nearly 250,000 square feet per year of old ceiling tiles from Pfizer’s New York City corporate offices will soon find new life.

The reason: the pharmaceutical company has written a prescription for them that calls for a heavy dose of recycling rather than a trip to the landfill.

The result: more than 160,000 pounds of old acoustical ceiling tiles will now be diverted from municipal landfills annually, helping Pfizer fulfill its corporate commitment to protect the environment.

Pfizer’s global headquarters is housed in four buildings in midtown Manhattan. The company owns two of the buildings and leases space in the other two. Each year, nearly a quarter of a million square feet of office space are renovated as part of Pfizer’s ongoing effort to provide its employees with improved work environments.

In renovation projects of this type, old suspended ceiling panels would normally be removed, thrown into a dumpster and taken to a landfill for disposal. Today, the panels are finding new life as a result of a unique ceiling recycling program offered by Armstrong, the country’s largest producer of acoustical ceilings.

The program, which is the only one of its kind, enables building owners to ship old ceilings from renovation projects to an Armstrong ceiling plant as an earth-friendly alternative to landfill disposal. As part of the program, Armstrong even pays the freight costs for shipping the old ceilings, which are used as raw materials in the manufacture of new acoustical ceilings.

Ceiling Recycling Part of Every Full Floor Renovation

According to Ron DiCola, Pfizer’s Assistant Director of Corporate Environmental Affairs, the ceiling recycling program fits in well with the company’s philosophy on the environment. “Pfizer has a strong commitment to sustainability that is actively supported by management,” he says. “As part of that commitment, we want to take a leadership role in recycling, seeking new and innovative ways to expand on our current recycling efforts.”

In keeping with this commitment, Pfizer now endeavors to recycle construction materials at its corporate campus wherever possible. Currently, the company is recycling both ceiling tiles and carpet as part of all full floor gut renovations at its New York City sites. Pfizer also reuses office furniture whenever possible.

DiCola explains that he learned of the ceiling recycling program as a result of one of three environmental studies the company had commissioned. One study dealt with “green” office supplies, another with “green” custodial and dining services, and the third with construction renovation practices. One of the recommendations of the renovation study was to look into ceiling recycling.

Once DiCola learned of the program, he passed the information to Mal Schuster, a Pfizer project manager involved in office renovations, who then included it in his next two projects: a two-floor renovation totaling 65,000 square feet of space, and a five-floor renovation totaling 100,000 square feet.

“There were some bumps in the beginning as there usually are with any new process or program,” Schuster states, “but they were quickly worked out. That’s because Armstrong is more than willing to work with its customers to improve the process. As a result, the whole ceiling recycling experience has been a very good one.”
Ceiling Recycling Program Requires Only Three Steps

The program involves three steps. First, building owners need to verify with Armstrong that their old ceiling tiles can be recycled. The old ceilings do not need to be Armstrong products to qualify for the program.

Following verification, old ceiling tiles must be stacked on pallets and wrapped for pick-up. At Pfizer, the removal, stacking, palletizing and loading of the old tiles is part of the demolition contractor’s job scope.

Once there is a full trailer load of old ceilings, the owner simply needs to contact Armstrong, which will then arrange for a truck to pick up the material and transfer it to its nearest manufacturing facility.

Schuster notes that pick-up of the old tiles has worked out exceptionally well, especially considering the fact that maneuvering tractor-trailers in midtown Manhattan is never easy. “In order to get access to the building, we have to schedule the truck to arrive at off-hours. In most cases, that means coming in on a Friday night and loading it very early Saturday morning.”

As part of his involvement in the initial projects, Schuster developed a worksheet that now serves as a historical data document for recycling information collected from each renovation project. The worksheet includes a formula for calculating the project’s ceiling recycling yield and its cost. For comparison purposes, it also includes a formula for calculating the cost of landfill disposal, had the ceiling material not been recycled.

Final cost comparisons are not yet complete on the first two projects, but Schuster believes the cost of recycling ceilings is not much more than that of landfill disposal, if not the same. “I believe it’s probably going to be cost neutral for the most part,” he says. “And, even if the cost is a little higher, it’s not an issue because of our philosophy on protecting the environment.”

Program Will Be Promoted to Other Pfizer Facilities

At the present time, ceiling recycling has only been implemented at Pfizer’s headquarters buildings. However, as DiCola points out, “It is our plan for the New York offices to be the bellwether for other Pfizer facilities around the country.”

DiCola notes that the program will be communicated to other Pfizer locations by a number of different means. For example, it will be promoted as a “Best Practice” in the “green” procurement section of the company’s website, and it will be highlighted at the company’s internal Environmental Health and Safety conferences.

DiCola also notes that Pfizer views recycling as only one element in the much broader issue of sustainability. “We consider it more as part of a supply chain partnership in which we work together with a supplier in a mutual effort to develop sustainable building practices,” he states. “As a result, we have a strong desire to form many more relationships of the type we now have with Armstrong.”