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# case study

## **SUPERMARKET CHAIN HONORS COMMITMENT TO ENVIRONMENT BY RECYCLING OLD CEILING TILES**

*Food Lion reclaims more than 600 tons of old ceiling tiles per year rather than dumping them in landfills*

Food Lion supermarkets promote themselves to shoppers as “the easy way to save.” They may soon be promoting themselves as “the easy way to save...the environment.” The reason: the supermarket chain is currently recycling more than 2,000,000 square feet, or more than 600 tons, of old ceiling tiles per year as part of its store renovation projects rather than dumping them in a landfill.

Headquartered in Salisbury, North Carolina, Food Lion is one of the largest supermarket chains in the United States with more than 1,210 stores in eleven Southeastern and Mid-Atlantic states. Its average store measures 35,000 square feet in size with approximately 28,000 square feet devoted to selling space.

According to Mark Rufty, the company’s Director of Construction, Food Lion gives each of its stores a facelift or “cosmetic” renovation at regularly scheduled intervals. “We like to freshen our stores up periodically in order to impart a more current look to the facility,” he says. “This type of renovation includes everything from re-painting the interior to changing out the ceiling.”

In the past, suspended ceiling panels removed from a store as part of a renovation would be thrown into a dumpster and eventually taken to a landfill for disposal. Today, those panels are finding new life as a result of a unique ceiling recycling program.

### **Alternative to Landfill Disposal**

The ceiling recycling program, which is the only one of its kind, is offered by Armstrong World Industries, the country’s largest manufacturer of acoustical ceilings. It enables commercial building owners to ship old ceilings from renovation projects to an Armstrong ceiling plant as an alternative to landfill disposal. As part of the program, Armstrong will even come and pick up the old tiles and transport them to its nearest manufacturing facility at little or no cost. The company uses the old tiles as raw materials in the manufacture of new acoustical ceilings.

To participate in the Armstrong program, a building owner or contractor must first verify that the old acoustical ceiling panels can be recycled. The old ceilings need not be Armstrong products to qualify.

Following verification, the owner or contractor must then stack the old ceiling tiles on pallets and wrap them for pick-up. Once there is a full trailer load of old ceiling tiles, Armstrong will arrange for a truck to pick up the material anywhere in the continental United States and transfer it to its nearest manufacturing facility.

In a time analysis, the process for recycling old ceilings proved to be nearly as fast as dumping them, so the program has little, if any, adverse impact on larger demolition or renovation schedules. It can also be less expensive than the cost of dumpster, handling, transport and landfill fees.



Ceiling recycling is now an integral part of every Food Lion renovation project. More than 100 stores, such as this one, could potentially be part of the program each year.

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## Program Is Easy to Implement

According to Rufty, Food Lion decided to participate in the ceiling recycling program for three primary reasons: "First, we want to be as environmentally responsible as possible, and this program fits in well with our company's corporate philosophy on protecting the environment," he says. "Second is its ease of implementation. It is a very well organized program that is easy to set up and put into practice. And third is a saving in construction costs. We have found that the costs involved with recycling are actually lower than disposing ceiling tiles in landfills."

Food Lion learned of the program through Armstrong and one of its acoustical contractors, Southeastern Interiors. When Rufty became aware of the benefits of the program, he decided to test it in conjunction with Southeastern Interiors and WIMCO Corporation, a general contractor involved in Food Lion renovation projects.

The test went so well, Rufty decided to roll the program out by making ceiling recycling part of every store renovation project. He estimates that 100 stores could potentially be part of the program this year, and the same, if not more, in following years.

## A "Win-Win" Situation for All Involved

Southeastern Interiors is an acoustical contracting firm that is quite familiar with the ceiling recycling program. Based in Buies Creek, North Carolina, the company has been involved in the program since its inception.

"What's so nice about this program is that it's a win-win situation for everyone concerned," states Jerry Milton, a Southeastern Vice President. "Our customers don't have to arrange for old tiles to be hauled to the local landfill, and, at the same time, it allows them to do their share of cleaning up the environment and reducing the build-up of solid waste."

Southeastern's initial involvement with the program came with Progress Energy, formerly known as Carolina Power & Light, a regional utility that serves more than a million customers in North Carolina and South Carolina.

As part of its work with Progress Energy, Southeastern not only installs new acoustical ceilings in the utility's office renovation projects, but also recycles all of the old ceiling tiles. According to Milton, Southeastern has already recycled more than 500,000 square feet of old ceiling tiles since the program with Progress Energy began.

As part of its contract with Food Lion, Southeastern provides the same turn-key type of service it provides Progress Energy, in the sense that it handles all the details involved with the program, including verification, removal, palletizing, shrink-wrapping and transportation of the old ceiling tiles from the site.

"Our goal, as well as that of our customers, is to help reduce the generation of solid waste," Milton notes. "The Armstrong recycling program helps address that problem in an environmentally prudent way."



Ceiling tiles removed from a store will eventually be shipped to an Armstrong plant where they will be used as raw materials in the manufacture of new acoustical tiles.



Once the old ceiling tiles are stacked on a pallet and shrink-wrapped, Armstrong will send a truck to pick the tiles up and transport them to the nearest plant at little or no cost.