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MassMEP Helps L-3 Henschel Stay in Ship Shape
*Premiere Naval Communications Manufacturer Revitalizes
their Design Review Process, Cuts Costs*

NEWBURYPORT, MA – When your job is to build communications equipment for every vessel in the United States Navy, quality is a top priority. Since 1919, the Newburyport, Massachusetts company L-3 Henschel has been the leading manufacturer of control, navigation and communications equipment for the US Navy and commercial maritime industries, providing systems that meet a wide range of military and commercial needs. Their Quality Assurance Program meets strict requirements of quality standards, and all products undergo a series of rigorous and environmental tests to ensure reliable performance.

In order to maintain their stellar reputation in the business and keep up with high demand for equipment, Vice President of Operations John Sewall wanted to make sure all employees were trained in their engineering design process. With a grant from the Massachusetts Workforce Training Fund, the company was able to team with the Massachusetts Manufacturing Extension Partnership (MassMEP) and begin training all employees in basic Lean principles. Lean is a technique that uses simple methods in order to eliminate waste and reduce manufacturing costs, and as a result, increases productivity.

“We wanted to eliminate waste from our production lines, streamline our process, and cut costs at the same time,” said Sewall. “The first step was to construct a value stream map, a tool that helped us lay out and manage our engineering design process, so we could identify and eliminate any real or potential design flaws in our operation.”

A series of kaizen events followed, where the team developed a detailed implementation plan for improvements. A kaizen is a focused, short-term activity designed to improve a process over a few days, with a goal of producing big results in terms of efficiency and productivity. Now employees go through a design review checklist before beginning each project.

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“We helped Henschel outline a list of specific design parameters by discipline, and helped them create a procedure for dealing with engineering change requests. This way, problems can be identified early,” said David Hess, MassMEP project manager. “They also now have a training plan for design review participants and an audit procedure to ensure compliance.”

Further improvements include revising Henschel’s sales process. They found that customer supplied data could be structured in a manner to cut even more waste out of the design review process.

“We wanted to improve our total operation and reduce the amount of waste within our production process, all while delivering an error-free design to manufacturing,” said Sewall. “David Hess and his MassMEP team really helped us produce some major results, and now each Lean training participant has the skill set needed to carry on through our Lean journey.”

The MassMEP is an affiliate of the National Institute of Standards and Technology (NIST) under the U.S. Department of Commerce. The national MEP system is a network of manufacturing extension centers that provide business and technical assistance to smaller manufacturers in all 50 states, the District of Columbia and Puerto Rico. Through MEP, manufacturers have access to more than 2,000 manufacturing and business “coaches” whose job is to help firms make changes that lead to greater productivity, increased profits and enhanced global competitiveness. For more information, please visit www.massmep.org, or phone 1-800-MEP-4MFG.

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