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MassMEP Lean Manufacturing Techniques Reduce Work and Increase Productivity at BTU International in Billerica

BILLERICA, MA - To compete in today's global marketplace, small and medium sized manufacturing companies have to constantly adapt the way they do business. A commitment among the 132 employees at BTU International (BTU) in Billerica to seek out and implement innovative manufacturing techniques has helped the company become the leading manufacturer of advanced thermal processing equipment for semiconductor packaging.

Using techniques learned through a Collaborative Continuous Improvement training program run by the Massachusetts Manufacturing Extension Partnership (MassMEP), BTU is making changes that have resulted in reduced processing time and increased efficiency in its manufacturing area.

BTU and five other local manufacturers, each a member of the Boston Area Semiconductor Equipment Council, participated in the program, subsidized by a Massachusetts Work Force Training Fund Grant. The workshop introduced the companies to Lean Manufacturing techniques and taught them how to implement Lean in their businesses. Lean implementation involves simple but effective systems that reduce inventories, clear shop floors and streamline production processes all with a goal of decreasing costs.

During on-site visits at each company, MassMEP Project Manager Greg King and his team helped participants select a specific pilot project for their facilities. BTU's project focused on their fully enclosed coil heater fabrication area.

“We helped BTU identify an area to focus their project on through Value Stream Mapping, a Lean technique that looks at such things as inventory, cycle time between each manufacturing step and making the most efficient use of time,” said King. “The next step was conducting a Kaizen Blitz which is a short period of time, anywhere from a couple of hours up to three days, where we identified an area to improve and then made changes. Working with BTU team members, we cleared out and opened up a significant amount of square footage in their fabrication area, which enables them to move inventory through to the customer quicker and eliminates waste.”

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“The MassMEP Lean Manufacturing Training Workshop was grounded in reality, providing reality based examples and hands-on workshops,” said Ron Pawelski Director of Operations at BTU International. “Most impressive was the three day Kaizen Blitz that was conducted at our facility working side by side with the MassMEP team. It wasn't just a planning session. We tore things down, cleaned up years of built-up dirt, disposed of inactive equipment, learned to think outside the box and rebuilt the area.”

After six months of implementation and continuous improvement activities started through the Collaborative Continuous Improvement Training program, BTU continues to see results. Work areas are now more efficient and more than half the floor space in the fabrication area has been cleared. Introduction of a Lean system with one of BTU's key supplier's has also cut cycle time by 50 percent, resulting in annualized savings in the heater manufacturing area of \$130,000.

BTU has also applied for an additional Workforce Training Grant and hopes to continue working with the MassMEP on future Lean improvement projects.

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, and click on the New England Manufacturing Supply Chain link, or phone 508-831-7020.

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